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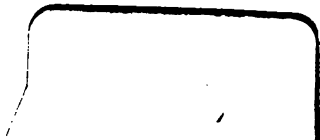


HIS LETTERS

JULIEN GORDON



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HIS LETTERS

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HIS LETTERS

BY

JULIEN GORDON

AUTHOR OF "MARIONETTES," "A DIPLOMAT'S DIARY," "A SUCCESSFUL MAN," "VAMPIRES," "Mlle. RÉSÉDA,"
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THE MERRISON COMPANY PRESS,
RAHWAY, N. J.

NOV 23 1892
CLERK

HIS LETTERS

CHAPTER I.

THERE had been a crowd about her painting all of the day, we were told at the door. But when we entered the gallery from the wet, darkening street, there were but a few stragglers left, loitering languidly, not as if they had a care for the pictures, but because they were afraid to venture into a cold, gusty twilight. By and by even these threw away or rolled up their catalogues, lowered their veils and hoisted up their petticoats, or turned up their collars and their trousers, as their sex might dictate, and made for the great banging baize door. So Thornton and I were left alone.

He had passed the picture once or twice with his rapid, cold glance, but, when he had the field all to himself, he came back to it

with a certain eager restlessness that did not escape my notice. One was apt to notice what Thornton did. What is it about some people that so arrests, so excites our curiosity? It is a riddle, sphinxlike, unreadable, untellable. We may say of this or that man or woman that we love or hate them, approve or disapprove; we may praise or censure them, extol or vilify, there is just one thing that we cannot do—ignore them. They hold us; be it to irritate or to charm, it matters not. We say of such an one: he or she is a person, an individual, a reality; occupying space in a world of shadows. We breathe them; whether they be mephitic or wholesome may depend upon our lungs, but at any rate they have furnished us with an atmosphere. It environs us, we absorb it, and it becomes a part of us.

Why do I say all this? I was thinking of poor Thornton. No one that I have ever met had more of this curious, inexpressible impelling power, force, call it what you will.

I can see him now with his pale and tragic face; his eyes that seemed to pierce the souls of others, while they kept so well

their own secrets; his tall, straight figure, his elegant, aristocratic hands; his set lips, with their expression which could be so sternly harsh, and again melt suddenly into a smile, whose sensitive beauty warmed the heart.

As he looked at this picture which, in an hour, had made the artist famous, I looked at him. I often did so, furtively, as men rarely look at each other. There was something in him that fascinated. He had come to the city where I dwelt, the great city of our Eastern civilization, alone, without wealth, with few friends, and he had thrown his glove across its cruel face defiantly, and he had conquered it. Of course he had been more or less well equipped; he was well-born, well-mannered, had taken high honors at his university—was, in fine, a gentleman. Yet how often all this is not enough! Later, terrible troubles had come upon him, troubles of which he never spoke, and he had for many years lived like a recluse, except when his voice thundered at the bar or from the tribune.

I looked down at the catalogue, where I

held it open with my thumb, and read the name of the picture before which we had paused, "Two Burdens." A desolate brown field, flat, stretching away to a dark red horizon, where a dying sun lay on a pile of clouds. Wind-swept, sere. In the foreground a few scraggy bushes, wan, fruitless. Across the melancholy desolation two human figures hurried. One was a humble, trembling, crouching creature, an old man in tattered garments, bowed under a great load which lay across his shoulders; tottering, weary, yet with a kindly, nay, happy light in two uplooking eyes. One whom Napoleon, meeting, would have said, "*Je m'écarte toujours pour qui porte un fardeau.*"

The other figure was that of a woman; a woman tall, queenly, lovely, dressed in queenly apparel. There were jewels upon the slender shoe, from which her garments were swept backward by a cruel blast, and jewels on her fingers and at her throat. She was wrapped in a rich cloak, or rather coat, cut in a strange fashion, of that dusky rose sheen of which Tintoretto seems alone

to have mastered the yellowing tones, but which the brush here had caught and riveted. Her head was borne erect and haughtily. One felt that those proud shoulders had never stooped to bear a weight ; but in her face ! Never was deeper anguish painted, never profounder agony portrayed. She seemed like one hastening to meet half-way some fateful presage, or speeding to escape some torturing doom. There was a wistful yearning on her forehead as of one who, seeking life, had found but death. It was a striking picture, startling ; and yet one felt to the many it might bring no meaning.

"Who is the artist, did you say ?" asked Thornton, turning to me eagerly, after a long and speechless halt before the canvas, on which a brilliant light was cast.

"Why," I said, astonished, "have you not heard, do you not know ?" And then I named her.

"Ah, is it she ?"

"Yes ; are you one of her friends ?"

"No," he answered smilingly ; "bats and

owls don't play with birds of such glowing plumage."

"But surely you have seen her?"

"I have not."

"Mrs. Moncrief is everywhere."

"I am nowhere. When the evening comes I go back with other night hawks, you know, into my woods. The light hurts my eyes."

"And you think this remarkable?"

"I do."

"She ought to know it."

"Pshaw!"

"I shall tell her."

"She will only laugh."

"Why should she who lives among pygmies laugh at the praise of a giant?"

"If she lives among pygmies, I presume they are to her taste."

"Can she who tells this story be a doll?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows? There are women who have souls only in the tips of their fingers," he said lightly.

"What, wield such a brush and have no soul? You blaspheme!"

"I am an old blasphemer, Milburn."

"Yet we hard sinners stopped longer here, I find, than that fair-faced girl who stared a moment, yawned, and moved on, apparently much bored."

"I saw that girl; she was craning for a lover, who didn't come."

"He was not worth expecting, then."

"My dear Milburn, you don't know the sex."

"Well, were I a girl I wouldn't look at painted things when I expected my lover. Love would suffice."

"Do you know the color of it?"

"Do you?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I ask because it's interesting."

"What, its color?"

"No, you."

"I?"

"Yes, you in conjunction with love."

"Oh, I am defunct!"

"Since when?"

"Since—years; dead as a dog."

"Dead! and that splendid outburst of eloquence, no later than yesterday, that carried hundreds away breathless on its wing?"

"That's mere froth. That isn't living. Dead men have voices too sometimes. By Jove! but I have missed my train!" He looked at the slowly vibrating pendulum of the clock that hung aloft.

"Dine with me at the club, or at my rooms, as you like."

"Your rooms, then."

By and by, over our cigars, "Milburn," he cried suddenly, "she's a genius!"

"Who's a genius?"

"The lady who painted the picture, Mrs. Moncrief."

"Why don't you go and tell her so, then? Women don't smite men for boldness."

He gave a short, dry laugh, "I am timid."

"Timid! Afraid of stage-fright, eh?"

It was my turn to laugh now at the man who had enthralled thousands with his voice.

"Exactly that." He shook the ashes from his forefinger.

"She's used to men, the fair Héloïse; she'll put you at your ease; *she* isn't timid. But, if tradition tells the truth, it says that women have had cause to be afraid of you."

"Tradition lies!"

"Humph."

Then somehow we fell to talking of other things.

And now that he whom I was proud to call my friend has passed into the world of shadows, and that she who inspired in him the mad devotion few women ever know, has also slipped into the silence that surrounds the spheres, methinks it is not all unfitting that these letters—simply the record of a man's loving—should be given to the world. They are but fragments—for some were lost, I ween, or willfully destroyed—which through the strangest circumstance fell to my keeping. In publishing them to-day I break no vow, am disloyal to no promise; I wrong no living soul, neither do I betray the dead. He who penned them was a man of genius. But love, such love as his, is too absorbing even for genius to portray, save haltingly. Hence I make no claim to the exhibition of genius—in these letters.

But spontaneity of expression true love

must always find. If these prove that love still lives with all its exaltation and its fervor in an age accused of materialism and of hardness, 'tis well. Of love, however, there are no proofs. He who would prove religion falters ; he can but pray. He who seeks decisive proofs of love is either knave or fool.

Such as they are, I give them. To me they were delivered in two packets, tied with a silken string all worn and soiled. There were no words upon them, except, marked in a woman's hand, "Before" and "After." The first were written, therefore, e'er they met, the late ones afterward. Between them I have written a few words. They are of her he worshiped. I knew her well, or thought I did. I may have been mistaken.

Letter First.

MY DEAR MRS. MONCRIEF :

Although I have not had the honor of an introduction, my name may not be entirely unknown to you.

I venture to send you a collection of

ephemeral papers published some years ago by a friend of mine. They have, in my estimation, some merit, and their subject, "Modern Art," may commend them to your favor.

Should you not care to read the book, may it serve, at least, to attest the respect, appreciation, and admiration with which your genius has inspired me. I have seen your picture! Need I say more?

Sincerely yours,

HUBERT THORNTON.

Letter Second.

MY DEAR MRS. MONCRIEF :

I had not thought that you would deign to answer my note, although I hoped you would accept the little work on art. I cannot tell you how deeply your courtesy has touched me. "Proud of a letter from me?" Heavens! I wish you could read in my heart the humility your words awaken.

Faithfully your servant,

HUBERT THORNTON.

Letter Third.

MY DEAR MADAME :

I help you ? That is impossible. You little know how much it would be in your power to do for me. In a sad life your genius penetrates like a ray of sunshine, to warm and invigorate.

But I say too much ; pardon me !

Faithfully yours,

H. T.

Letter Fourth.

There seems to be no doubt that the letter which I sent at five o'clock yesterday was delivered. What has become of it ? What also has become of your second letter that I should have gotten yesterday ? Bear with me for a moment while I tell you about the last two days. On Friday, I was not fortunate enough to get a line. That did not hinder me from sending you a letter that day. Why should it ? I did not write to you because I really believed that you could care to receive my letters, but because it gave me such great pleasure to write them. On Saturday morning, I got a kind, a most

kind message in the letter whose envelope I inclosed to you two hours ago. From something that you graciously said I hoped that I might have still another line from you yesterday ; but that again did not withhold me from sending you a long letter at five o'clock. From you, since eight o'clock Saturday morning, I have heard nothing, until I got the note which has distressed me so to-day. You tell me that you have failed. Of course you have failed. I know well enough what that means. It means that out of sheer compassion you did try to think a little kindly of me, but that you have found you could not. I am not surprised. I deserve nothing at your hands. I would give no woman a moment's weariness, least of all, one whom . . . but my tongue is palsied.

Letter Fifth.

I cannot understand your letter. I received but one letter from you yesterday. It was in the inclosed envelope, and came by post very early in the morning. I hoped for another, but got not a word until this

moment. I wrote to you, however, and that there might be no possible miscarriage I took myself and placed it in the hands of the messenger. Where is that letter? It would simply kill me to have that letter go astray.

I can never trust that messenger again. The torrent shall find other channels. You should have nothing to do with one so cursed of fortune. As I told you, I have no luck. You ought to have a superstitious horror of me, but you have not, have you? That is because you are an angel.

H. T.

Letter Sixth.

So the letter is lost. It seems to me that I could have hurled the earth from its axis to get back that letter from a stranger's hand; the thought that any eye but one should look on it is pure agony. I cannot rewrite it; I might as well try to recall the blood my heart lost yesterday. But my heart is still strenuous, still loyal, though I thought it would break this morning.

But I can write another one. What

smote me as with a bludgeon was your thought that I could get a line from you, and let a day pass without answering it, or thanking you for it. Why, what should hinder me? I should have to be dead. Don't imagine that I wish to place you under any similar obligation. I would not have you write a word that you did not wish to write, that you could help writing. What would such a word be worth to me? I will not even tell you again when your silence makes my day a blank. Ah, I am grateful for small favors.

Do you think I do not thirst to see you? What chains at my door and chains at yours could bar me out?

I have an atonement to make. I must not give it the *coup de jarnac*. Jarnac cut the cords of his opponent's knees; and of course the poor wretch fell prostrate, and all in vain he waved his sword.

But write I must. When once I thought that I might not, my head fell forward on the table and I sobbed.

Is it true that you are not well? O God, it is not possible to receive so much

of sweet and bitter in one stroke ! But I will be good, so quiet, so very calm ; and you will still let me write to you now and then. I will never tease and worry you. I will not say a word about myself, or even about you. I will talk only of art or of books. Surely it cannot vex you to hear me talk of these.

Ah, as I told you once, a touch of some hands suffices to freeze or to inflame ; to lift to heaven or plunge in the abyss. Do not be careless with such touches. If I had your power to appall, or torture, or ravish with a word, I would be generous. If the letter which you so sweetly sent me yesterday went by post, it may reach me to-morrow morning. Let me hang upon that hope to-night. You saw that when I sent you the envelope I kept the precious letter that it held. It was the only one I had left. I could not part with it quite yet.

I cannot write more—I have been made so timid by your first letter this morning ; you made it so clear to me that it would be much wiser if I wrote no more. Good-night ! Good-night !

Letter Seventh.

. . . Let me tell you what you have done for me. Of late, since you have let me think of you a little, since I have not felt so utterly daunted and dismayed, a wondrous alchemy seems to have been working in my brain; you are always there. You exert the strangest influence. I know that my thoughts are more sinewy and more fecund, that my vision is clearer; but most marvelous of all is the change that has come over the face of the earth. It is eternal spring with me; I see all things through a haze of sympathy and gratitude. I cannot glance at anyone, or speak, or write without an overflow of kindness from my heart. Oh, others get some of the drops from the fountain which your gentle wand made gush out from the rock; and think what this means to me! I used to be very irritable; my nerves seemed always on the rack. Now, only one thing can disturb me. If by chance a small annoyance or petty impulse come to me, I smite them aside: "Not now! The house is full, the queen

is here." Does this seem to you but raving? I suppose so, for you have needed no such purification, no such stimulus; and, if you did, it would not be in me that you would seek it.

So you are learning to fence, madame. Marguerite, too, was a mistress of the rapier. I am not to be scared so easily. Do you imagine you can hide your sex under the costume of a page? Don't you know that you are the very quintessence of femininity, that your whole being throbs with that eternal womanly about which Goethe used to speak? Don't you know that is why you can't help drawing "hearts after you tangled in amorous nets?"

I had a lovely dream last night; I dreamed that I found again, in the folds of a small note, some violets. But this time their scent I could not recognize. It startled, perplexed, excited me. "Is it possible," I said, "that these flowers can have touched a lady's lips; that what makes me so giddy is the lingering perfume of her breath?" You see what idle fancies come to one in the still night. At all events,

these violets have also ceased to have a separate existence; and I believe the thoughts they are transformed to cannot entirely discredit the sweetness of their origin.

You ask me why I despise —. I have no personal grievance, but I have known him do such mean things to men who were too weak to defend themselves. He is always squat like a toad, close at F.'s ear. But there is no lack of mean men in the world, and this is no reason why one should think of him at all; were it not that he has a great deal of scholarship in certain directions. And he is one of the few men outside of professors' chairs who can discuss intelligently Spinozism, Hegelism, the "Categories" of Kant, and so on. What arouses contempt is to see a man, commanding such weapons, apply them constantly to sordid and petty ends. It is as if a tramp had sneaked into the arsenal of heaven.

Good-by! Ah that I might add another word just here.

H. T.

Letter Eighth.

I held my hand from writing, yesterday, because I was trying to heed a certain injunction: "Promise you will never send me one line unless I bid you." I had to disobey it once, on Tuesday, for there were things that belonged to you; things that had been already said, but missed you. I had firmly resolved, however, never to disobey again, though I did hope that in the spring, when you had gone to the warm country where such as you should always dwell, you would lift the veto, and permit me to send to you my fleet, sad messengers. But now, in this morning's letter, it half seems to me that you have lifted it. You ask me questions. How shall I answer them if my hands are tied? If I am wrong you shall rebuke me softly, and I will be mute.

Ah! those dainty volumes which you sent me with my name inscribed, and your lovely, lovely letter breathing forgiveness; and yet the gentlest of reproofs in every line. Yes, and there was something else—

that tiny ribbon of pale blue silk that fastened the little parcel. I said, "Was it not her fingers that fashioned the little knot?" I hope it was; don't tell me it was not; for I have made a collar of it and have it now around my neck. A silken chain is it? Yes, but if it were forged of iron, as a slave's collar ought to be, it could not grip me tighter.

It is also sweet to me to think that the scrap of your handwriting on these fly leaves I am privileged to keep. But I shall keep much more. Do you think that my memory, which can store up such lifeless trash as dates, will ever surrender one of your kindly words?

Last night I heard some people praising you. My heart warmed toward them, and yet I felt a certain jealousy. Oh, peerless one, what is this pain I feel when they but say your name?

Do I like Camors? Do I like Alcibiades? Do I like Crichton? Chastelard? Do I like any of these figures in history or fiction?—which, of course, is the truest history—that curse boys by infection and

make so often their lives a ruin? Of course I like them, because some natures have an affinity for poisons and seem to tolerate what to others would prove fatal. But unhappily, in the packed thoroughfares and ferocious struggle of to-day, a man can only aim at excellence in one thing, and fortunate is he if he reaches it. The most that one can hope for is to convert one's self into a useful machine. A man, in the old sense, one cannot be; that is the pity of it and the tragedy. Men used to conquer their destiny; now they submit to it.

The wonder about Camors is that a humdrum *bourgeois* like Feuillet should have conceived him. But Compiègne accounts for that.

Bret Harte? Oh, yes; I like him well enough. But great Heavens! you must not talk about "revering" anybody. It is for a goddess, for the woman of whom one says, "*O dea certe!*" that such an expression is reserved, and I doubt if even a goddess would quite like the word. I am sure that Aphrodite would have curled her lip at it.

Letter Ninth.

If I lived forever—and it seems to me that you might give me what another, no sweeter than you, gave Tithonus, the gift of immortality—I could not tell you how I love you for driving up to my door to-night. Ah, how right my instinct was when I spoke of Marguerite de Valois, whom I used to dream of for years. She would have done what you did. And do you know, I was at home at that moment. I had been notified by telegram that a lot of men were coming to see me—me, in the mood that I was in. I heard the sound of wheels, and told a servant for God's sake to make it plain that I was out, and would not come home till midnight. Think of it! you were close to me, and I was kissing your letter at that moment. That letter came when I was dining. There was a man with me. It agitated me greatly. I needed ten minutes before I could answer the sweetest message that could come to any man upon this earth. I had not expected it; I was thunderstruck. I thought,

"She believes me capable of wounding her again! Was not once enough? And it is therefore useless, for the moment, at all events, to try to touch her heart. By and by, perhaps, she may better understand whether she has misjudged me; and then she has too much gentleness not to be sorry for hurting me to-day."

But what right had I to feel hurt? Any hurt would be too good for me. What did my repentance amount to if I could not bear punishment?

But the idea that you imagined I mistook you, that I was talking to you as one might have talked to any handsome or silly woman—'twas that which made me feel a sort of despair. "Can it be possible," I said, "that she, whose every word, every suggestion, every reticence I have been poring over all night, can believe that I care for her only for her fair face? Behind how many fair faces flashes such a soul as yours? and what an indignity to me, although my past may have deserved it. Should I wince the less for that—that you should hold me capable of thinking of you in the

light way that men may think of other women—ah! you don't know the difference between little passions and a great one. Neither did I know it until now. You don't see that the one annihilates even the memory of others; and that a man can no more think of anything but noble things than, translated to paradise, he could look back upon the follies that had sent him to purgatory.

Ah! I was blessing you because I could dream again; because the sight of the deep sky or a far-off strain of music could again set my spirit soaring, as it did in the golden days. And then, just then, came your letter, in which you taxed, or seemed to tax me, with speaking of you in the same breath with a dreadful woman. Well, no matter. Of this we will speak no more.

It is just because I am no saint that I am grateful to you for lifting me above myself. It may be—so strangely is a man's dual nature mixed—that you could not do this unless you had a lovely face; but sure, but doubly sure I am that you could never do it unless you had a lovely soul.

It is late. Let me send this quickly, lest it be too late to come to your hand to-night ; and let me write again to-morrow, for I only live in you.

I will answer you fully about Camors. There is much to say that I left unsaid. Good-night ! Good-night !

You have been to my door. I would that I might die to-night.

Letter Tenth.

It is four o'clock in the morning. I cannot sleep. I have been lying with my eyes shut, looking at you. I have turned my face due southeast, in the direction where you are sleeping. I have murmured your name, and I have tried with a great effort to force my spirit through the walls of brick and stone, that it might look down upon you sleeping, and breathe upon your cheek. It must be possible to do this. We are no more children of the sun than we are creatures of electricity, and the electric spark needs no wire to run upon ; the viewless air is wire enough. They will find it some day—that means of communion beyond the

barriers of sense. I have not found it yet, or how could you have been so near to me last night, and my heart not have burst with the knowledge? You have divined the secret of my life. I have been from childhood haunted, possessed with the passionate desire to forget myself, to lose myself in the thought of another. My life has been one ardent, desperate, and at last hopeless quest of something I could never find; but when love comes you know him. There is a seal upon his forehead, and in his voice there is a music that enthralls the body and the soul. Ah, when love comes, death has no terrors. What can death do to one that laughs back at him and says, "Smite! for I have lived!"

Not Heaven itself upon the past has power;
But what has been has been, and I have had my hour.

My God! when I think of Wednesday night I want to die out of sheer ecstasy at your incomparable goodness. Oh, had you come in you would have found me breathless, prostrate on the floor; and never would I have risen until you had set one of your slender feet upon my neck.

Later.—What does my secret matter? Have I guessed yours? Ah, tell me what it is. Don't tantalize me by such questions if you never mean to answer them.

Do you know why I cannot trust myself to allude to certain words that you have uttered in your last letters? I scarcely dare to whisper them to my own heart. I never do whisper them save in the dark. Do you think that for one tear of yours I would not give the reddest drops that gush out of my heart? I can no more forget them than I can forget my own identity. I shall carry them with me to the grave; and I would disdain a heaven to which I might not bear them with me. Oh, I have wished of late that I too believed in a personal God, that I might pray to him to bless you for your immeasurable sweetness to me. You never can imagine what you have done for me. You didn't understand what I meant when I said that you could do a hundred times more for me than I for you. You had already begun to do it, and now the work is fully done.

How beautiful your letters are! It is

their exquisite unconsciousness which is so fetching, so irresistible. You write like that great lady of whom De Quincey talks, who, without knowing the meaning of the word rhetoric, wrote the lovely English tongue in a way to make Addison seem ponderous and stiff.

You ask me about C. He was not at all a man to my taste. He never could get very far above ground. The ideas were very commonplace that he boomed forth with a big voice. But he could feel intensely, and in that respect, at all events, he was every inch a man. I happened to be dining at Mrs. ——'s house when C. was brought in and first introduced to her. I glanced at them now and then. She had a fixed look; one saw that she was interested. That fixed look, we know what came of it; but at least in that *partie à deux* there was no cheating. The cards were on the table, the stakes were equal. It was not a caprice against a life. She played the game out to the end, and although the waters have gone over her, I say, or rather I said, that in one respect she was a finer

creature than P., who slew a man from pure *désœuvrement*, as lightly, until the very last, as thoughtlessly as she might have thrust aside a dog. That was my first thought, and if it made me very ireful, it was because I felt certain that wherein P. was lovable she must be just like you. And you approved of her! You, then, would do such things, I thought. Now I have more light.

I shivered at one sentence in your letter. I will not tell you now what it was.

You have set me to thinking about Camors, and about the strangeness of the fact that in that story the woman should be so much stronger and more virile, yes, and braver than the man! And then I remembered that there lived once in Rome a lady who was the prototype of her that loved Camors. You are familiar, no doubt, with the fact that Arria is a counterpart of Feuillet's heroine.

You say you like my letters; I am ashamed of them. I fain would keep your respect. It is because you are all ruth and gentleness that you say you like them. Only

de Musset's hand was fit to touch the page that your deep eyes should gaze upon. If I had that touch of his I would brush you as with the wing of a humming-bird, and you should smile and know not why. But he is dead, and we that study him do but like other babblers—hurt where we would soothe, and harm where we would heal. Good-by.

I have not heard from you to-day, and I am worried and depressed. But it would *quite* kill me if you were to write in charity.

Letter Eleventh.

I have just read your letter, your letters. Ah, you are too good to me! I hesitated to open the envelope. I turned it over in my fingers. "What will she say to me?" I thought. "It would be so easy for her to kill me with one word. But no," I said, "she is too gentle to hold me blameworthy for what I uttered in such a whirlwind of excitement as I wonder that any man can bear and live." One does not—you, at least, would not—resent the outcries of a man in a high fever. You would not rebuke him.

You would say, "Poor man, he raves," and glide away. But yet, I thought, even in delirium a man may innocently say something that jars upon the fiber of an ear infinitely more delicate than ours.

I read the letters. The first was balm to me. Ah, there is no woman in the world who can be so placable as you. I think you would not hurt a fly that with an instinct for security perched upon your slender finger.

But the second—the second—I felt in an instant that some chord had been struck wrongly—which chord? I have not found it yet, but I will find it.

You told me things that I did not understand your telling me, about the feelings of other men. What have I to do with their feelings? Do you think mine like theirs? Why, there was a faint suggestion of the very stroke that pierced when I got your little note yesterday, in the afternoon. I knew very well why many men would be irresistibly attracted. I have eyes. I am not blind. But I have something that they, or some of them, at least, have not. It was

through a pathway which spoke not to the passions but to the soul that you had made a willing thrall of me. Do you think that the men who are merely conquered by your physical attractiveness, however compulsive it may be, are translated as I am ; that they are made better, oh, so much better, by the thought that they can talk to you ; that they find dawning for them again that strange light that never was on sea or land ? Don't you see that the others love you for themselves, and that I am not thinking of myself at all ? Do you think men would die for mere desire ? Oh, no ; it is only worship that men die for.

Don't you know there is one unerring method of distinguishing between the men who care only for the lovely shell which is your body, and leave neglected and unprized the sweet mysterious story which the shell tells of the ocean whence it came and whither it must go ?

Does it follow, because you have the figure of Diana, and a fair face behind which lurks a divine vitality, that all men—all—must shut their eyes to that without

which you were only the most seductive of all odalisques? The touchstone is so obvious that a child might see it. Indeed, I think the soft eyes of a child might see it first.

Why, there is all the difference in the world between the hunger for possession and the thirst to be possessed! To have one's mind, one's heart, one's soul preoccupied, monopolized; to think no thought, thrill to no feeling that does not point to her; aye, and to crave high thoughts and the noblest feelings because they alone seem worthy of her, that absent, far-off, hopeless you adore. There you have the easy, decisive test. Most women never could apply it. Their petty vanity about their outside would come in. But you can, I am sure that you can, for you are too proud to be vain. The test is whether a man teases her for perpetual presence, for close contact; or whether he cannot be too grateful for communion with her mind and with her heart.

What stabbed me in the beginning of the note that I got yesterday, in the afternoon—

I could not read it then—I have read it now and well I understand its playfulness—you are most lovely when you play;—what shocked me was that you seemed to take all the outpourings of my heart for so much comedy; that you seemed to class me with men whom, really, I look upon but as so many stags, and who seem capable of seeing in the most perfect woman only the female of their species.

You seemed—you must forgive me, I know now it was but seemed—you seemed to think me capable of soiling you in my own heart, under the cowardly shield of a comparison; and you also seemed to say that my view coincided with that of a despicable idiot whose name I shall endeavor to forget. And do you know why the iron entered into my soul? I said, she has heard things about me. They convince her that I only care for what most men care for. She cannot judge me for herself. And then I felt something of the madness of despair, the madness that cries, “Let us curse God and die!”

A single word will partially express how

much I owe to you. Until I had begun to dream of you, it was ten years since I had read voluntarily a line of poetry. Think of it! For ten years I had looked upon the imaginings of those interpreters between earth and heaven as so many pretty lies. Ah, I do not need to read the poets now! All they say has come back to me in a torrent, a flood.

I will not breathe another syllable about myself and my own feelings. They are not worth it. I will do what I meant to do when I began; calmly and sagely address myself to answering your questions—questions for which I am very grateful, for reasons that you can guess.

Camors? I did not answer that question fully. Let me deliver a little lecture on Camors. Imagine me an Oxford don, if you please, with high waistcoat, coat of formal cut, short, meager whiskers, the rest of the face closely shorn, compressed and important lips.

Messieurs et Mesdames: In Camors the author has unquestionably drawn a highly interesting figure, but has he proved his

case, that is the question? M. Feuillet has essayed to show—[Is not this the true soporific, academical manner?]*—*that the code of honor is an inadequate substitute for religion. But suppose he shows that it is simply as strong and as weak as religion, neither better nor worse? M. Feuillet tells us that the code of M. Camors worked well enough until it was shivered by collision with a great passion—a great, you would please to observe, not a little one. What reason have we to suppose that in precisely the same circumstances religion would have been a more effective shield? The whole record of Christianity, ever since the priest first crept behind the throne of Constantine, demonstrates the contrary. We need not point to the long list of popes that cared more for the clews to the heart of a woman than for the keys of St. Peter. Look rather at Abelard, that Camors of the twelfth century, that wondrous doctor in theology, that man who, until he began to read lectures like this to a charming woman, was indeed a saint on earth. So M. Feuillet has proved nothing. He did

better with his other tragedy, the "Petite Comtesse."

This is very nice and cogent, isn't it? But it doesn't explain to me why you should have asked me the question. . . .

Letter Twelfth.

I know nothing about Isabella the Second. I recalled Marguerite of Valois, whom you insult by the comparison, because she was the sweetest woman in a century far better worth living in than this; and because one of the most loyal-hearted men in France went cheerfully to death for her sake; a fool, wasn't he?

I burn your letters because they are sacred to me. I burn them from the same motive that makes it odious to me, disgusting to hear your name so much as mentioned by other men. You cannot understand that. It seems *funny* to you. How absurd you must think my letters. They might be set with effect to some of the mock-sentimental music in "Patience," if you have not forgotten it. You are a very accomplished surgeon, madame. You

know precisely how and when to apply the caustic. I congratulate you upon the skill which testifies to your experience. You make, however, a somewhat excessive use of the remedy. A touch would have sufficed.

Letter Thirteenth.

Don't you know what you did? You committed the crime of *lèse-majesté*. You sinned against yourself through me. You accused me of insulting by comparison a woman whom I adore, a woman whom I know to be an angel. Oh, my God! my eyes swam over that first page, and I could read the rest only by snatches. Don't you see that I love you, and that you must not, ah! you must not play with me? I don't ask to see you, but oh, let me believe that you believe in me!

Ah, I have kissed this letter a thousand times, and yet I was half sorry to get it. You know "it works like madness in the blood to be wroth with those you love." And I was nursing the thought of such a sweet revenge, such revenge as the angels

may take upon a mortal. "Ah," I thought, "I will wring tears of contrition from those sweet eyes. Wait a moment," I thought, "I care not what she has said in the past, I will do that which will cause her never to doubt in the future."

Oh, you stabbed me when you said that man A. would think exactly as I thought. Does he worship you? Why, it was only last night that I was telegraphed to dine with a lot of men. That man L., a good man enough, was one of them. But I said, "He will be sure to mention *her* name, and I cannot bear it." So I declined the invitation. It is a horrible thing for a man to hear anything said by common men of a woman of his own caste. And how infinitely more heart-scorching is it if she is the only woman in all the earth to him!

Almost all night I lay awake reading your last two letters. There are three now, thank God! You will let me keep these, will you not? I have them, Heaven knows, by heart, but there is a faint perfume about them which intoxicates me.

But don't you see, dear, how deadly a

wound you gave me in return for my humble prayer for forgiveness, when you accused me of comparing an angel with a dreadful woman, and put me on the level with a cad ? But if I did pain you, oh, forgive me ! I did not dare to tell you that I loved you. Those words that Shelley robbed me of have been always on my lips :

One word is too often profaned
For me to profane it.

God bless you ! He will. It is with you and such as you that he peoples heaven ; or else let me be banished.

Letter Fourteenth.

I am in heaven. Now I cannot write for joy. If I drop to earth to-morrow, it will be to worship her who sent me skyward for a day.

Ah, yes ; I can sleep to-night—sleep, that sweet counterfeit of death. I bless you, I am on my knees to you.

Letter Fifteenth.

SATURDAY NIGHT.

I came down from the clouds to-night. I

would not stay there until to-morrow. You see the earth-born are restless in the ether. They breathe not well in too fine air. I prefer the Elysian fields. Here at least you can find papyrus, and a swan's quill, and the ink of violets. That is why the gods are far less happy in their isolation on Olympus, than the tenants of the blissful islands where swift-footed Achilles, and Diomed, Athena's darling, are.

Ah, that page, one page in your letter! it drowned me in delight. You knew it would; you *meant* to drown me.

You will not think it strange when I tell you that I love you so deeply and so truly that I have often, in my thoughts, given you to other men—dead men—that would have been worthy of your smile. Once I gave you to Alexander, in the hour of his radiance, at Issus, while he still had the heart, as well as the prowess, of a demi-god. Ah, had it been you, and not that other whom he found in the tent of Artaxerxes, he would never have sent you to your father. He would have found such magnanimity impossible.

At another time I dealt with you in a fashion still more adequate. Then it was Julius that I thought of, the fateful, invincible, inscrutable; the famous man of all this world. I could see his grave face lifted from the tablets where his hand still held the *stilus*. I could see his eyes blaze as they fell on one infinitely nobler, aye, and more fateful than that sweet serpent of the Nile. "But no," I thought, "I will not give her to any man of that type. A poet would appreciate her better. I will let Catullus see her," I said; "yes, Catullus in his youth, before Lesbia had taught him to think evil of women. Then, indeed, he would have made the 'Epithalamium' a matchless masterpiece."

On the whole, though, I concluded to give you to Chastelard. You would have pitied him. You are not like that deadly witch of Scotland whose white bosom hid only a stone. You could never have stood by and seen him go to his death, and not have made one cry, one moan of agony, responsive to the reproachful yearning of his latest upward look.

How glad I am these men are dead, for there are limits to unselfishness! Luckily, there is no one living that is fit for you to touch with your gloved hand.

Until to-day I had thought that the sweetest thing I ever read, or dreamed I had read, in a lady's letter, was a small word of four letters that slipped, as it seemed, unpremeditated from her pen. I am not likely to forget the context. It ran like this: "What has happened to us, *dear*, do you know?" The italics are mine. Long I pondered whether the word were meant or no. Being pessimistic I finally answered in the negative. But, for all that, it would keep ringing in my ears. But what do you think happened to me when I heard from the lips of the same lady that I might speak frankly—often—the only word that speaks my heart? It matters not with what wistful and tender ingenuity one may seek to suggest the deepest and most devouring of the passions. There is no periphrasis, no synonym that can compass the full significance of the simple word, I *love* you—the one word which, for one long second, as

with a jet of ecstasy, surrenders, empties, exhausts, denudes the soul.

Your hygienic counsels are highly edifying. Would I like you to take care of me? Why, yes, if I were quite sure that the nurse would prove indulgent, and that the physician would make a free use of stimulants. I should hate to be fed on gruel and kept at a low temperature. So your rules are strict. I care not though they were constrictive even; but I never could comply unless the author would personally supervise the processes. Then, I am sure they could not fail. There is nothing, I think, ails me that a wise leech might not cure. And by the way, I love not that old man who was allowed to trace out the tell-tale lines upon your palm; aye, and touch the lovely hillock that swells just below the thumb. I trust he, too, is dead. He ought to be. The men also that have danced with you; I have killed them all in my fierce mind. As for that natatory costume, if any man but Neptune has beheld it, I hope he got the cramp and sank. Oh, I have a dark suspicion! . . . But I blas-

pheme. Alas! you made me, you deliberately made me. There are a dozen different men in me, and you know how to dominate them all. But one chord you alone can touch: you alone can make me think of summer, of the songs of birds, the scent of gardens, the haunting accents of the poets, all the beauty and the mystery of life. I might love you in a hundred ways, but it is for this that I adore. It is when I think of this that I best measure the profoundness of my debt to you. I love the peri, she that stands at heaven's gate disconsolate, even better than I love the woman. And also, when I think of this, and forecast the tragic chances and more woeful changes of man's lot, I question whether life can ever hold a better hour for me than this. That was a high teaching of the Stoics, that it ill becomes a man to stand with front lowered, at death's mercy; but that at his own judgment seat he should decide when he would die. It surely were the part of wisdom to select the hour when one is loftiest and happiest. But alas! those austere, clear-eyed ones never

could have been in love; they knew not with what desperation a lover clings to life.

Once a lady asked me what words in all my letters I thought that she liked best. Were they not those four words in which I had defined her mind's rare quality, the motive that swayed her, the key to her life? Not in vain had I probed her, but with a fond, sure instinct. From me the Sphinx cannot lock up her riddle. I play *Œdipus* too well. I guessed it, and therefore it was that I escaped—if indeed my escape be certain—the fate of them that missed the secret. Is the lady answered rightly? It was a wise Russian who said, "The head vaunteth a freedom which the wiser heart disclaims." I thank you for translating it. It had else been to me a sealed oracle. I am glad that you are more learned than I; for I would have you in all things loftier and larger, as well I knew you were in most. I can see best when I look up. But in one thing you can never come within gun-shot, eye-shot of me! You can never feel for me a tenth part of what I feel for you. You

will never, never, never say to me what I say now—I love you.

Letter Sixteenth.

Your letter of Saturday has this moment reached me. But for one word in it I should be willing, I should wish, to die now ; for well I know that I shall never be so happy again. You are going away. Good God ! can you suspect what that word means to me ? And yet I am glad of an opportunity of proving what my feeling is for you ; also glad to suffer by anything that you wish to do. Oh, when you told me about your health you wrung my heart ! Why would I hurt you, I that love you ? I that would even be content never to see you, never to write another word to you, if only every night and morning some strange pre-science would tell me that you were well and happy. Oh, you can't believe me. It is the curse of my wayward life that now, when I would give my soul to be believed, I am not. And yet people go to church and pretend to believe in Mary of Magdala, and they will not see that

in the throes of a great passion a man too can be born again.

Why, the fools and blind drove Hugo's "Marion de Lorme" off the stage, because they could see nothing but coarseness in a line that might have been murmured long since beside the sea of Galilee :

Et l'amour m'a refait une virginité.

Of course you have heard things about me ; you may hear more. Some of them may have been true, too, once—I know not—but they are not true now, not now. Oh, I have lots of enemies—thank God for that ! They have kept me alive by quickening the instinct of warfare, until a feeling fell on me so incomparably higher that I forgot all about them.

How could I speak of you to A. ? It makes my heart beat like a flail even to hear your name mentioned, and I know that I grow red to hear it. I despise A., and he knows it. I have seen him but once for a second in a year, and then, when he put out a hand, I gave him a slow single finger. L. is a very different man, but him I see as little as possible. I have seen him

but thrice in a twelve-month, and then for a reason not directly connected with himself.

I am puzzled to know what question it is about your art which you will put to me, and which I am to answer, right or wrong.

As you yourself do not know the meaning of your pictures as well as I do, it is a hundred to one that I guess right.

Ah, a great sadness clutches me—you will never care for me!

Letter Seventeenth.

WEDNESDAY, DAWN.

Did I not divine you, long since, far-off, to be an angel? Did I not know that you maligned yourself when you told me that you were not "very gentle"? What but an angel of gentleness and heavenly compassion would have had the tender forethought to provide me, in that precious little note, with a talisman—a talisman against the doubts, misgivings, loneliness, sickness of hope deferred, that would have made those weeks of your absence a very hell to me. Now that I have that, and can clasp it, kiss it, stare at it until my brain

reels, my eyes swim, why ! I can be almost happy.

There is still one thing—a little thing—that, in your boundless kindness, you might do for poor me. There must be in existence somewhere a photograph, a photograph of yourself, or at least of your portrait, of the sweetest thing that breathes upon this earth. Oh give it to me, give it ! It will help me to bear what is to come. I know well how a splendidly vitalized woman is libeled by a photograph ; but it will be better, so much better than nothing. And with the fires darting from my own eyes, as they probe it, I can inject vitality and splendor into it. Don't say you can't, will not. Do it, do it, for the sake of him whose life-blood you have drained a hundred times.

I once heard someone say that you had a sweet little ear. Do you think I did not guess it, with all its deep significance ? Ah, nature fashioned you in her fondest, maddest mood. In a thrill of terror lest the earth should be dispeopled, she evoked you, to reassure herself !

That promised summer night ! It floats

in my enchanted vision ever. I had often dreamed of it, dreamed as we dream of heaven, long before I had any hope that it could ever be. Ah, to sit by your side near the water, to see the wind play with your hair, to watch with fond, furtive glances the heaving of your bosom, to drink the soft tones of your voice, to gaze with you over the waves, not more inscrutable than are my darling's eyes, or into a sky less fathomless for all its depths, than my affection! And, then, perhaps—all at once—our eyes would meet, our hands would clutch and scorch each other, for one moment you might love me, and our souls would rush together at the meeting of our lips. That picture, oh, that picture! when I see it I can write no more. My hand trembles; I can write no more to-night.

Letter Eighteenth.

Those terrible days, Thursday and Friday, when I knew not even where you were! But I will not say another word about it. I shudder to think that, shortly, you may say, "Why, this is getting to be a terrible bore!

Does the man think that I have nothing to do but write letters to him and listen to his driveling?" That is sure to come ; let me not hasten it.

I have a letter written on square white sheets ; a sweet letter, though there was a drop of bitter. It spoke of a surmise which had "swept over your consciousness involuntarily." When I first read that, I wanted to seize the pen and use it as a knife. But I have sworn never, never to say one harsh word to you. If I speak now, it is with nothing but tenderness and sorrow in my heart. You will continue then to accuse me of baseness? I say it not angrily, but softly. Does not such a surmise imply that, —for a moment, at least—you have believed me to be telling you untruths? It is not by lies I wish to win you ; you may attract, but you cannot keep a heart by such devices. I could not love a woman such—as—well, never mind—if I felt tempted to be untruthful to her. Don't you think that soon or late a man's wounded self-respect would hunger to avenge itself? But, dear, I have said a hundred times more than I

meant to say. I do not believe you thought it ; I do not, really. If I did, I should choke. I could not speak, I could not write to you ; for how could one write what is not believed ?

And now, since I have begun so badly, may I go on and tell you something which weighs like a pall upon my mind ? You have asked me some searching questions ; that is your prerogative ; but let me just put tentatively a little one on my own account. You need not answer it. Indeed, your silence would be an explicit answer. Let me tell you of a thought that clove me like an arrow, as I lay awake one night, since your departure. Suddenly, I thought, " She is too wise ! " I sprang up and got some of your letters. I ran over them with a new purpose and a most penetrating eye. Every now and then I marked a passage, and when I had finished, I went back and scrutinized those passages with the utmost care. Ah, never, I think, was microscope with greater power invoked to give up the inmost meaning of a woman's words. I compared these passages with some that I remembered in

former letters of yours ; and then I said to myself, "There is no German metaphysician can evolve the myriad turns and phases of one passion from the depths of his inner consciousness !" What then ? Why, then comes the question which, posed, answers itself : "How many times has she been madly, utterly in love ?" To me it is an interesting question, because I know from sad experience that a man can love but once ; though he should not be blamed for mistaking the dawn for the noon sky. But I know this, that one man, not devoid of imagination either, could never have written certain words, except in the last six weeks of his life. Don't pay any attention to this question. That, as you once told me, is the best way.

Don't write to me ; I am miserable.

Letter Nineteenth.

I am writing to you at five o'clock in the morning. I have been restless ; perhaps in written speech I shall find a sort of calm.

You said in one of your letters that you

might have to pause, to stop, to chill me ; in another, that the day might come when I would hate you. That day can never come. But I passed through many phases of feeling, yesterday, and at last, when I had to go to bed without a line from you, I was chilled indeed. It had seemed impossible to me that you could leave me with nothing but a telegram that, taken by itself, distressed me. I could not be so unkind to you.

In your Monday's letter you forbade me to write to you. I read the words carefully again last night before I burned the note. I burned every scrap of your last letters last night. I haven't a line of yours now. I know this is what you wish, but I did it in a gust of anger, and I have been so sorry since. Oh, I have such a bad temper ! If you knew how bad it is, you would detest me. But it is dreadful to be chilled ! If I must die, let me be scorched to death. Ah ! I think that you, at least, would feel some pity if you knew what an agony it is to be in love. To pant and writhe incessantly with hope unsatisfied ; to stretch out one's arms wildly, mutely, and clasp

nothing. Oh, you cannot guess even what I mean. You are an icicle; you have told me so. You must be, or you could not talk of chilling a man in such a plight as mine.

Is it because I tell you that I love you, love you; that for the first time in my life I know what love is; is that the reason that you say, "I may have to chill you"?

Oh, why, why don't you put me out of my pain? I wouldn't let a dog suffer as you make me.

Later, Eight o'clock.—Four hours more! The postman has come and gone. Still not a line from you. My God! don't you ever mean to write to me again? Must I live through another day like yesterday? Have mercy.

Letter Twentieth.

I have your letter. Heavens, how much I have to say! Shall I say it well? I know not, and I care not; only let me say it quickly. First, let me whisper to you—no, let me darken the room first; there—
● give me your ear, though it is hard to do,

for I am on my knees, not by your side. Let me whisper to you, oh, so low that you yourself shall scarcely hear it, that for me you have no secret, no surprise. When I saw your pictures they produced an extraordinary effect on me. I pierced, riddled them with my eyes. At last I thought I guessed the secret of their strangely complex, mysterious, resistless power over my imagination. "Why," I thought, "she holds the brush as of a vestal virgin who has dreamed she was Faustina. My God, what a celestial, maddening, destroying combination? But it cannot be. Such things don't happen, don't exist except in the crater of your own volcanic imagination. You have given woman a million charms in your fancy, to which she has not, in fact, the slightest title, and now, just because this one, whom you have not even seen, exerts, in her art alone, on your keen, quivering senses—for they are keen enough, they are that—a strange, nameless sorcery, you must straightway proceed to credit her with incredible fascinations, which the Greeks, in their wildest ecstasy, never dared as-

cribe to but one goddess. . . And so you haunted me; and I have asked myself strange, foolish questions; and I have laid traps for you; oh, such obvious traps, they could not check your little foot more than a second. At the worst you would only feel that you had tripped over a violet; and you did trip over one. Ah, but I think you saw it, and laughed gayly! . . . "Oh yes," I said, "she is the Sphinx to all other men, but I have guessed her riddle, and therefore it may be that I shall live and not die." But presently came doubt again. "Outside of myths and legends," I said to myself, "no such bliss could come to a man". . . and then I rushed to the other extreme. I was angry with you for having actually made me believe in an impossibility. I fiercely demanded, "How many times has she madly, utterly loved?" For I thought, "Now, if she has had lovers, she will be angry and will show her anger. But if . . . if she has not loved—my God, it is impossible! Yet if . . . admitting the impossibility a moment, she will give me a strange, enigmatic answer; she will

not be angry or reproachful ; she will simply say to herself, ' Ah, he is puzzled, and no wonder ; I am puzzled myself.' "

But scarcely had the letter gone before I tried to overtake it. I looked at your portrait, at its mouth and chin ; and I knew that, should I get that ambiguous answer, I should be conscience-smitten ; that never, never should I entirely get over it. That was what I meant when I told you that I felt as if I had committed that sin against the Holy Ghost, and it was sacrilege to dare to love a saint ; and yet I do dare to love her a million, million times for that treasure her heart, which she keeps in store for him she loves. Oh, darling, darling, I am fainting ! do you mean to give it to me ? Tell me, tell me ! see me only when you like, as far off as you will, but tell me instantly, for God's sake, that of late you have meant, that you do mean, some day, to give it to me. Oh, tell me, tell me ; do you want me to die of love at this moment ? I am dying. . . .

Letter Twenty-first.

I wrote you a long letter last night, but this morning I won't send it, lest it should give you some pain. It was a cry of agony and of farewell. I meant to send back with it that little thing which I had worn all the days, and kept crushed against my mouth and nostrils all the nights. But when I found it close to my mouth this morning I could not send it back just yet.

But I cannot write much this morning. I am trying, trying to understand why God permits a woman like yourself to live, who is at once so lovely and so cruel. What crime have I committed that I should be made the victim of your cruelty? No, I cannot write just yet. I am trying to reconcile the words you speak with other things that seem to show a tender heart.

Don't you think, on the whole, you had better unchain me and let me go? I am going away on Friday, at ten—that is, I leave my house at that hour. How much do you really care, I wonder. How much can a woman, who speaks such words de-

liberately, care about any human being except herself?

Letter Twenty-second.

TUESDAY.

Ah, yesterday will live forever in my memory! Your letter! Such a letter! What would you do with me? Do you want to destroy me in advance? Is that a wise economy of love? But you have never said you loved me. You don't know whether you do or not. That was a dreadful word to me. I must have that . . . nothing less. Well, I know that there are other things you could give; things I would sell my soul to get. But seest thou not; could I but gain thy heart, I should not need to sell my soul to get them? They would all be mine then forever, indefeasibly, unshakably. As things are, it was an appalling truth that you uttered, and don't think I have not foreboded it. Ah, your words, "To-morrow you may do or say or think something that shall rob you of your power and me of an illusion." Oh, perhaps I have done that already in the

little space since those words fell. If I had your heart, nothing I could do or say or think could dislodge me; for at worst it could be but a blunder, repented of as soon as done.

How then am I to win the heart which is still free? It must be free, since it would instantly recognize the loss of freedom? I can only do it by convincing you beyond the possibility of misconception that I love you better than I love myself. I must win it by self-sacrifice; there is no other way. Oh, I don't think that my self-sacrifice would win the laurels of Philistia; my notion of altruism would seem to the Philistines, I imagine, quite indistinguishable from naughtiness.

I really do not believe you know that if some day in a moment of feminine softness and ineffable pity, you gave your love to me, you would do yourself the least harm in the world. Perhaps I should account it the noblest of impulses. If a man doesn't thirst day and night to possess, in the completest sense of the word, the woman he pretends to love, he does not

love her. It is only in the time and circumstances that one can test the depth and force of his unselfishness. Do you remember telling me, in one of those burned letters, that a woman who envied you your beauty and your intellect, and I know not what besides, said to someone, who told you, "As for the fair Héloïse she invited him, flattered him, completely charmed and dazzled him, and so, in art, he is her friend." That you had charmed and dazzled was so true; the woman's instinct was unerring; nothing but the cold facts could perplex, baffle, and confound her. Who would believe that I had not been at your house, or in Capua, or the Lord knows where? that you do not know me; that we have not met? . . . It is my business, then, as he that loves you, to do that which you are too generous to suggest, and to deny myself that on which I have been feeding ever since you went away—the hope of seeing you immediately after your return. The cackling and the babbling will soon pass away. In three weeks, at furthest, they will have put all

their prying, spiteful questions, and they will have got their answer. Then, if by that time you have not forgotten me, I will implore you not to punish me because I loved you better than myself, but to let me come and look at you, as I now look at your picture, perhaps . . . to take your hand. . . .

Letter Twenty-third.

One hour after I posted a letter yesterday I would have let a hand be lopped off to recover it! I do not write, my pen is driven by the mood of the moment. There is something in my brain that forces me, if I speak at all, so to speak that words shall seem things, realities, and that a mood shall live upon the paper even as it lives in me. So in certain moods I needs must say words that shock and horrify. . . Ah, your moods all ought to be transcribed, when you write to one who cares for you, for they are all beautiful and lofty. Even your kiss would be that of an angel, but with me it is not so, and of some moods of mine you shall never more behold a sign.

In these letters that came to me this morning and that I have read with tears, you asked me to swear on the honor of a man who wishes to respect himself, that I will never again write to you letters like those I sent to you on the morning when you went away. I had already sworn; now I repeat the oath. But that is not all I swear. In one of those dear letters you say a word that flew straight to my heart, to all that is left of generous and noble in my nature. You said, "let me lean upon you." "O God!" I cried, "how can she lean upon me unless I make myself something better? By Heaven, I will try!" Now listen; I swear to you that never again, whatever may be my thoughts, will I say to you by letter, or should I ever see you, by word of mouth, a syllable that I would not have my mother hear; not one! not one! Oh, believe me, there are still in me some possibilities of grandeur, but you, you only can evoke them. I am going to give you a consummate and decisive and incredible proof of what I am capable of doing in the way of self-abase-

ment. For days I have been dizzy with the thought that perhaps I should see you soon. Well, I renounce it! Were I to see you now—now, or until I have gained more self-control, and forced myself to think of you as a saint only—you could never, never lean on me. I want you to think of me with honor and with implicit trust. Oh, it must be better, better, better in the end, when one must die, to know that one has been a martyr, than to have plunged in earthly bliss.

I read thee deeply, truly, my beloved. It is only on the lovely surface that you are one of the women who madden and enslave. At heart, at heart you are a seraph imprisoned thus—I know not how—and I know, yes, I foresee, that you would hate yourself and abhor me, if on awakening, some morning, you should find dust upon your wings. Not through me shall one fleck rest there, not one fleck, no, not one.

Later.—You have asked me another of your searching questions. Oh, what an adorable intellect is yours! This one I

will try to answer ; and I will do it, as I will always write hereafter, in words that a child might read. What an exquisite sensitive and delicate instrument is your heart ! I used to think mine sensitive, but it is a dull, dense thing to yours. One word more before I follow that probing question to the deep place where it is quivering. What is the past to me ? to you ? I simply never lived till now. I cannot conceive myself living in a world which you have ceased to glorify. I am nothing, know nothing but the present and the future, and they are what you choose to make them. You are the first, the only woman I ever saw—the only mortal thing embodying what I knew and felt must exist somewhere—the beautiful, mystic combination that haunts us on the canvases of the Renaissance ; the being at once etherealized and carnalized ; the divine mystery that has the body of a lovely woman, and yet whose wings are fully grown, Oh, until one has seen those wings growing and growing there—he has not lived, he was not born.

And yet one delaying word ! Of course I want you to pour out all moods to me. Why, that is a kind of love, the best kind, and I will be so grateful for it, and try to feel that such love is enough. Never think that I would wish to cramp or dwarf or stifle you, or check with a word or thought one of your sweet, wayward fluctuations. It would never enter into my head to wish to "adapt you to myself." Why, it is not myself I love at all—it's you. I will prove it to you in a memorable way ; I will "force myself to have strength," you shall see.

And now that question, "Do I think marriage, or the same thing, kills love always ?" I will at least answer truthfully, first from the man's point of view ; then I will try to seize the woman's, though for me that will be difficult. Granting the existence in a man of an organization sufficiently delicate by nature, and sufficiently enriched and attuned by cultivation to appreciate a woman of absolute refinement—I assert, with perfect confidence, that whether or no fruition strikes the death-knell of that which sought it depends upon the woman.

If what such a man as I have indicated feels for a given woman be a mere caprice, or any of the little passions that have their root in curiosity, vanity, or mere desire, there can be no doubt whatever that possession means a more or less rapid, but in any case inevitable, refrigeration and decay. But whose fault is it that the man felt only one of those emotions that, by the law of their existence, are easily, quickly satisfied? It is the woman's fault; she reaps as she has sown.

The other day, ten days ago, a sudden impulse made me take up a little tract that hitherto I had not cared to read, and that I trust your eyes will never look upon—the “Kreutzer Sonata.” I went through it carefully, and laid it down with a sigh; for here was a case, it seemed to me, where the heart knew not its own bitterness, divined not why it was so sad. And yet the man who could write “My Religion” deserved to know what love is, and to have been in turn beloved. But, in fact, nothing was more clear to me than that Tolstoi has never been in love. Having got this clew

by intuition, I went back and tested it in a hundred sorry and shabby conjunctures where, as he averred, mutual disgust and loathing were the sad sequel of desire. There was not one of these in which one could not see that the man would have acted otherwise had it been love he felt. Instead of its poor counterfeit; had he thought always of her and of himself never, or only for short and repented intervals. Ah, when a man truly loves a woman, he cannot bear the thought that she should lose through him, even for a second, her self-esteem. What were all delights, the most maddening, compared with the undying agony of such a thought? Above all, I noticed in Tolstoi's sketch a strange blindness to the fact that it is when a woman has been kindest that a man needs not only the devotion, but the wisdom and tact of an archangel, if she is not to shrink from him . . . a little. But I must pause and cool my style—or I shall shortly grow half guilty in my thoughts again. But how would it be with a woman, with a supreme woman, a woman of genius like yourself, for

instance? Ah, here I must speak with the utmost doubt and diffidence. Could her love outlive fruition? Admitting that it was real love, the largest, the most complex, at once the most ardent and divinest, I cannot speak with certainty, but, alas, I fear that hers—that yours—would not. For it is plain that in such a case the reverse of what we were just saying would be true. Her constancy of will and of desire would depend upon the man—and what man living, or that ever lived, has been endowed with an organization so exquisite that it could satisfy the delicacy, even if it could the fervor of her own? There is no such man—there never was—and it is a wise instinct that prompts certain women to shrink with horror from the hour of possession; for, for them it will strike almost certainly the knell of passion—which dead, affection will soon languish—and what then would be left for the men who loved them but the grave?

Oh, I thank you for the portrait. I have pored over it long. I shall not tell you what I see in it, but the old man was almost as wise as I. I see where it is inadequate, but

it is divinely lovely; and yet I have restrained myself from pressing it wildly to my lips. I have sworn not to kiss it, and therefore I am holding the picture with a firm hand, at a safe distance. Fear not, beloved, and think not that I say this jestingly. I *will* be strong, and you *shall* lean on me. But will you not say one sweet word to encourage and thank me?

Letter Twenty-fourth.

A boy! what poignant flattery! Would to God I were, if I could get the boy's heart back again, his trust and faith! But you will not help me call it back again. You will not give the little thing with which a boy's heart is satisfied; little to you, but not to me to whom, of late, everything is symbol.

Loyal to you, loyal to you? That you could say that implies a doubt. These doubts destroy me.

Ah, I see the certainty that you are about to escape my importunate letters—Good God! I suppose you class them with others that you receive daily—is already having

upon me the dividing effect of distance. You will let me down gently. You will refrigerate by merciful degrees ; and at last, when you are fifteen hundred miles away, you will tell me that on the whole and considering all things, it might be well to let this correspondence cease.

I can bear the stroke ; I have expected it.

It doesn't surprise me in the least that you should say, " When we meet I shall be of ice ; expect nothing, hope nothing. You will hate me." I have never supposed that you were really anything but ice ; that your feelings were anywhere except in your head. I never, in my sober moments, expected anything, hoped anything. And if you should ask me in a perfunctory way to come and see you, I should know that you did not mean it, and that at heart you would rather that I stayed away.

Let me tell you that I said certain things to you, not with the least wish to please you, but because they pleased me, because they eased my heart, and because they were true. Let me tell you it is a pleasure to dwell for an hour in a fool's paradise. You

are one of those wise prophets that know how to provide for the fulfillment of their own prophecies. In one thing, however, unluckily for me, you are mistaken. I shall never hate you. I am too deeply grateful to you for that. You cannot, at your light will, rob me of the feelings which are an eternal wellspring of stimulus and joy.

I am glad you read my second letter, that went by post, with some sympathy. I thought it would get that if it reached you. To-day, a week hence, it might be different.

I shall go on writing to you until I get what may be called the second degree of congelation. Even then, I will try to thaw out a last few words. Meanwhile I will rack my brains for topics of an airy, entertaining, and undisturbing nature. Let me catch the careless, mocking, *fin de siècle* tone which matches so perfectly the disillusiones and the shams of life. How tired you must be of tragedy. It is quite out of date—bad form. *Bon voyage, madame, bon voyage!* I trust the girlish ardor with which you shall welcome new sensations will be as fresh and

artless as the boyish folly that craved a word from you.

Letter Twenty-fifth.

THURSDAY, MIDNIGHT.

It will perhaps remove what seems to exercise a slight strain upon your mind if I tell you what is the truth, that I have just burned every one of your letters that I had left, talisman and all. There is, now, absolutely nothing that you ever touched or saw, except the books and a little piece of ribbon which I return to you. This will enable you to say with even more complete certainty than usual, "I do not know the man."

Au plaisir de vous revoir dans l'autre monde, madame!

Letter Twenty-sixth.

I don't expect you to answer this letter. I have lost all hope of ever seeing your handwriting again. If you consent even to look at this it will be infinitely more than I deserve. I do not ask you to forgive me, for I know that I have offended this

time past forgiveness. I have tried all day to frame a few words, but I could not, and if now, at last, I put forth a feeble cry, it is not to plead the faintest justification for my wicked act, but only, only to mitigate a little the nature of the feeling with which you now regard me. For it is not quite scorn with which you ought to look on me, no, not quite that. It is rather the horror with which we look on the insane.

It is only within the last few hours that I have myself been able to understand what happened. Up to eight o'clock last night I had shut my eyes and refused to consider settled the fact that you were really going away. I had not grasped it at all. I had all day been very much excited, passing swiftly from one mood to another, thrilled with rapture one hour, and melted to sobs the next. But what your going away would really signify to me had not been disclosed to me at all. It was not until I sat alone in my bedroom—your last letter—yes, the last—had just reached me, that a sense of the appalling loneliness which would be mine upon the morrow, and the next day, and for

weeks to come, flashed upon me. I perceived suddenly that I had been literally kept alive by your letters for a fortnight past, and by the power I seemed to have of calling you up to my mind, as long as you were in the same atmosphere.

But that was because I knew in which direction to think, and where you must be, at least, at certain hours. But then, all at once, I saw what would befall me: that a few hours later I would never know where you were, that I could not even tell in which State you would be, that my imagination would never be able to find you, but that it would grope and flounder like a lost soul in the abyss. Ah, I never can make a sane person understand what this conviction meant to me. I have found, since I began to know you, that I could live in the brain, as other people live in the air; and it had been so infinitely sweeter than any life I had ever known that the thought of losing it maddened me. I could not think or reason at all. I could only keep saying to myself, "She is gone, gone, and I can never find her!" And then the awful

blankness of my existence as it had been until lately, and as it now would be again, fell on me with such a shudder as one in a trance might feel who hears them nailing the coffin over his head. Then I seized your two last letters, as if they were wires that led to you, and might bring rescue. I tried to read them, but I could not as a sane man would; not as even I can read them now, to-night when it is too late. You told me to "be reasonable," and alas! at that moment I had no reason. It seemed to me that at the moment of departure, and when I most desperately needed every thread of hope and faith, it seemed to me that you had taken everything from me, that you had chosen my hour of need, not to accent but to attenuate; and then as I thought that, leaping quickly from bad to worse, I said, "Oh, Heavens! she is regretting. She wishes to recall her words. She would rather I did not have them. She is thinking of herself all the time, and not at all of me, that am to be left here in this frightful solitude." And then, as a man that has a knife

stuck in his heart turns it round in the frenzy of his pain, I tore out of my breast-pocket all the latest letters that I had been treasuring from a sort of blind instinct that I should need them, and I hurled them into the flames—all—all, even the card which bore the dates and places.

And I found, a minute afterward, when I tried to pull some charred remnants out of the fire, that I could only recall the addresses in N. and O. and that the rest had gone from me.

For a while, as I sat, staring at the embers, I seemed to have no distinct consciousness of any thought or feeling; and the first thing that took shape in my mind was a wicked desire that I might not suffer like that all alone. "My God!" I said, "shall not she suffer too?" As if hurting you could make me any less wretched! Oh, I tell you that such wickedness as that deserves more pity than detestation; for no sane man could feel it toward anyone—and how, in Heaven's name, to you, who had been, that very day, an angel of kindness and sympathy, who had wept because

I had wept? Why could I not think of that, last night? Because I was mad with grief and the anticipation of what I was to suffer, and self-pity for the destruction of those letters, and a wild wish to pull down the firmament in a general ruin. And then I wrote those vile masterpieces of iniquity! the two notes that you got this morning. I had a maniac's ingenuity in coining phrases that would wound. In my mind I sullied you by odious doubts and suspicions that you had no doubt been playing with me, amused yourself studying a new and morbid type, but that having exhausted it, you would now, when you were a long way off, and could not be teased by hourly entreaties, let me know that on the whole you did not care to have so much of your time taken up with correspondence, and that I had better employ my talents in a more useful way. Oh, yes; all night I kept saying to myself that that must be the epitome of your thought, for otherwise you would not go away. Ah, you must see that I was mad.

I was so afraid that I should oversleep

the hour of departure ; and what, as the night wore on, seemed of all things the most intolerable was that you should go without my telling you that I didn't care—didn't care—and make you, if I could, believe me. And so, in a fever of haste, I went out soon after dawn, long before the shops were open. I wandered about the streets, came home again, wondered if there was any other fiendish thing that I could do, remembered my little ribbon, plucked that off, determined to make you understand that I wouldn't keep anything of yours ; went out again and found a messenger, and then, having completed my despicable work, came home and threw myself all dressed upon my bed. I was tired, exhausted, I suppose. At any rate I was in a troubled sleep when a servant woke me up to give me those—those six lines that you had traced upon a card. The torture that I have gone through since I got those words of yours were not like the torments of the night. They were not those of a fiend, but of a wrecked and hope-forsaken human being. I knew that there could be no for-

givenness for me now; that even if you wished you could not think as kindly as perhaps you did. But I thought that to-night, if I was able to write at all, I would try to picture something of what I have gone through, so that, instead of despising me, you might be moved to feel a little compassion. I do not ask you to say that you can look upon me more in sorrow than in anger. I do not ask you ever to speak to me again. You have only by silence to let me know, as gently as you can, that you do not care to receive any more letters from me; indeed, I could not write again if you would let me, for I have lost the next addresses, they are destroyed.

In a letter which I wrote you Wednesday afternoon I said, "Forget me not!" The only word that I dare say to you to-night is *forget*. Forget, forget! for then, perhaps, months hence—you have been to me so infinitely forbearing—you might—you might forgive. Would it at least raise me from the dust if I swear to you that sooner than again give way to the infernal impulse to make you share my suffering, I

would find a quick and easy way to rid you of a curse? Would it? But no, answer not ; never address me again.

Letter Twenty-seventh.

FRIDAY.

I went out last night, in the blizzard, at midnight, to post that outcry of despair ; and this morning—oh, this morning ! I find my wild prayer answered, answered before you heard it. Oh, no ; you heard it in your heart. Ah, that was Christlike ! Why, if there were no religion, such women as you would make men like to invent one. Whence, whence sprang in your white bosom that exhaustless fund of gentleness and forgiveness? Oh, worshiped one, my savior, why did not you punish me, destroy me? I wanted, I yearned to be destroyed by you, in a blast of justice. I wanted you to trample on me, to set your small heel on my worthless neck, and grind me into dust in the fury of an offended goddess ; and you do not, you will not. Ah, you came straight from heaven ; the earth is no place for you !

Do I know what is the meaning of that pain at the heart? Before I knew you I longed for sudden death. I cared not how soon it came. But you, ah, that is different! You are a blessing to the earth. No one with a soul can look at you and not be better for the sight. Oh, you should never have a pang! When I think that you may be suffering now, and that I can do nothing, I that would die for you—O God! let me wait a little, I can write no more.

Later.—See, dear, I am kneeling to you at this instant; I am clasping your knees; I am looking up at you and praying you that the very moment you receive this letter you will telegraph me that you are perfectly well. Don't leave me in this agony of anxiety a second longer than you can help. You will not, will you? Oh, let me thank heaven for these electric wires!

Those vile letters that I wrote in my despair and anger, there is nothing you could say of them that I would not underscore with a ferocious, scathing emphasis. They were unmanly, despicable, dastardly, because they aimed to make you suffer, from

no reason, from no better reason—think of it!—than because I was miserable myself. Why, that is the very distinctive mark of fiends, who, because they are in hell, try to vent their spite and envy on harmless human beings!

Something you let drop of youth. What meaning has the word to one that thinks of you? I happen to know that you are more than a dozen years younger than I, and I would to God the interval were less. And let me tell you, dearest, that if you were much younger than you are, I could not love you, not quite so much as I do now. You would know less; your range of vision would be narrower, your feelings less intense and sensitive. They could not animate, inflame, electrify every fiber of your lovely body as they do now. It is only a full-grown woman, in the flower of her mind, her soul, and her vitality, that can both feel passion and inspire it. It is only for the ignorant that Elaine has any charm. To me give Guinevere. Ah! if I might but sit by your side, and recall the sad idyl to your sweet listening ear.

Somewhere in this letter I have used the word anger. Anger, anger with you? Now listen to me, my beloved, I invoke no god; but here in the forum of my conscience, which is god enough for me, I swear to you that if I ever again say to you, deliberately and intentionally, one word that hurts you, you shall not need to smite me with your forgiveness. I will punish myself. Believe it, and say to me that you believe it. Say it, dear, and prove it by writing to me gayly and teasingly; just to see how meek and lowly I will always, while life lasts, be to you.

Let me just touch on one thing that you said in one of your latest letters. You see, divinest, that I remember every word, though the paper that had left your hand exists no longer. You said that when I saw you I must expect nothing, for I should find you *de glace*. As I read that I said, "Is it possible that this gracious lady imagines that when I see her I could pain her by showing her a consciousness of her graciousness? Does she think that by a look, a tone, a syllable, an accent, I would betray

a recollection of some sweet word she might have whispered to me in a distant dream? Does she not know that if a man is worthy to kiss the hem of her gown, it is when a woman has been kind that he is humblest; that it is to degrade me infinitely to apprehend the contrary?" Ah, no! believe me, when the day comes that I shall look upon your face, you shall find me sufficiently conventional. And I am sure that you and I have between us brains enough to talk in a decorous, lively, and fruitful way even about the weather.

Oh, what have you done with my little silken string, the only thing I had left that I thought you had touched, my precious ribbonlet? What have you done with it? Have you thrown it out of the window, or flung it on the floor, to be trodden on and swept away? If you have, it has served me right, but if by chance you have kept it, tell me, will you not? and I will tell you what to do with it, not now, but on some distant day, when I am not so sorrowful, and when I know that you are well.

Tell me one thing more. What did you

mean by bidding me be entirely loyal? Do I understand your thought? I need no such command. It is utterly impossible for me to think of another woman; all others simply do not exist. It is not possible for a man to be unfaithful when he truly loves. He is like ice, dead to every other member of her sex. This is true, and some day I will tell you more of this . . . Now, dearest, a last word. Let no fear of being hurt by me ever again trouble your soul. The remorse and agony that I have known in these last two days have done the work of a lifetime. So, do what you will to me, never shall you hear a word or see a look of reproach. Good-night, good-night, good-by!

Letter Twenty-eighth.

Ah, you did pity; you could find it in your heart to forgive. Your telegram—I see—I see the heavenly compassion that beamed from your eyes, as you whispered those words of balm and joy ineffable, to a self-stricken one who desired, who yearned to die. “Everything is forgiven and understood.” Forgiven? God bless her! Yet,

alas! so sweet a woman might out of sheer gentleness forgive brutality she could not comprehend. But "understood"—oh, did your instinct tell you what that word would mean to me? You could not "understand" unless you had begun to care for me just a little. When you said "understood" it was as if you had shyly, shyly touched my parched lips with your soft fingers. Ah, yes; you can see, looking back, what I too am able to discern, that your going away was the unmeant, infallible touchstone of the depth and nature of the feeling that I have for you. If I could unshaken, nay unruffled, have seen you, at the last moment, go away for weeks and thousands of miles, if I could have seen that without a heart-splitting explosion and very earthquake of the soul—I should have utterly misconstrued the fervor and the quality of what I took to be affection. It would have proved that I had taken the name of love in vain. Surely you will never again ask me to search my heart, and weigh and measure the truth of my words to you. I gave, without meaning, a terrible proof of my sincerity, for I

hurt you—*you*, whom if another hurt he need look for no mercy at my hands; the tortures of the lost would be too good for him.

Later.—I emerged from my cell last night, and went down town to dine with a lot of men, intending to come home by ten, for I grudge every moment that I cannot give to thoughts of you. But there was much wild talk of literature, of art. What are these things to life? And H. insisted on unfolding to L., to D., and the others, some dream he has of carrying the war into Philistia. So I did not come home till midnight—in a bad humor—vexed that so many hours were gone which I could have employed much better, and wondering, wondering what you were doing at that moment. “You fool!” to myself I said, “do you fancy that she thinks of you? Thank your stars that she has not spurned you, that she did not tear the heart out of your body, in the fury of her wrath and scorn!” And so, grateful yet downcast, like a man reprieved from punishment, but doubtful whether the sun will ever again shine with the same warmth

—I came up to my bedroom. There on the table lay a telegram, "Good-night! The angels guard thee." It was from you the whisper came. Did you not feel with that marvelous sixth sense what happened to me then? Did you not see me cast myself upon my bed, clasping your message in my hands, and thrusting it close to my heart? Did you not hear me speak to you? You must have heard, for in that vision it seemed to me that I had force enough to bound across the gulf that parted us. I found your room—I entered it—you were sleeping—one of your hands lay like a lily on the tender margins of your breast. The other hung trailing over the white edge of the couch. Ah, do you know why in your slumber you drew that pendent hand away with a pettish, fretful motion? Because you felt my kiss upon its finger-tips. I was kneeling to kiss that which was so kind to me.

Good-by, thou that hast the secret of being at once in two places, no matter how wide apart they be.

This word I post now, to make sure of its

arrival before you leave. To-morrow I shall write again. Oh! telegraph me that you are quite well. Don't leave me in suspense about that also.

Letter Twenty-ninth.

I received your telegram of nine o'clock last evening. Bless you for sending it, though it was with a poignant mixture of feelings that I read it. Oh, you were ill all the way, and you are ill still; and you do not revile and curse me for having offended! My God! what shall I do? You will not let me do the only thing that might a little revive my self-respect—accept with humbleness the harshest, most galling thing that you could say to me. Kiss, ah, yes, I crave to kiss the foot that spurned me. You will not let me do anything, then, but loathe myself and worship you? Oh, when you do these things, you set yourself so infinitely above all other human beings I dare not look up. It would be sacrilege to love a saint. I was all wrong, all wrong in the tenor of my dreaming about you. I see that in fashioning you nature hesitated

long ; that her hand faltered, doubting whether she would make you a Venus or a Madonna. I know that you could be the one, and whether you could be the other I know not now, and I will never dare to guess. But, my adored one, since your heart can frame no conception of vengeance, except to bless them that smite you, let there be no limit to your mercy. Do this too for me, do this. Tell me that you will burn, that you have burnt those two wicked letters that I sent to you that Thursday morning. If you keep them you will look at them again, and I shall know it, I shall know it by the sinking of my heart. For God's sake, dearest, do this for me. Alas ! there is nothing, nothing, nothing I can do for you ; nothing to prove the agony of my repentance.

Later.—Do you remember in one of your letters—oh, I have forgotten none of them ! though they are no longer here for me to kiss—do you remember bidding me pause and weigh the “value, strength, and truth” of the words I said to you ? Dear, I have weighed them, and they have no

strength and no value. If I had the high virtues of Plato, and the quivering fingers of de Musset, I could not distinguish and unravel the myriad fairy threads of emotion, sympathy, and admiration that make up the cable of my love for you. My words hold nothing but the truth ; oh, they are true ! How could they be aught else ? They come not from the brain, but from the heart. You know that heart ; you created it. You took a blank page and stamped it all over with your name. Why, I could not lie to you. I tried to in those two vile letters when I sought to prove that I did not care, I did not care. But I could deceive no one. The dullest eye in reading them would say, "The man is wicked, mad, but yet—he loves her." You say you, "love the sun, the light, the air, all those lovely sky influences that make one healthier and higher." Ah, you shall never again have aught else from me.

I would that by my death I could make thee immortal. You needed not to tell me that never in your life have you had an envious or malicious thought. How could

you have? Whom should you envy? It is they who must look up who envy; not she who, wherever her soft eyes turn, must needs look down. And where envy is not, how could malice find place? It could not breathe in such an air.

You say I do not know you. Alas, I know you but too well! It is the perfection of my knowledge that racks me with those dreadful pangs of self-abasement and contempt. How could I dare to try to wound you? Oh, I am a worm that strove to sting a god.

Letter Thirtieth.

SATURDAY.

There are many things, dearest, that one realizes for the first time in his life when one is utterly possessed (in the Scriptural sense) by a great passion. One is the horribly congealing and desiccating effect produced by mere distance upon the written word. Now, if I were discoursing upon public affairs, if I were a diplomat sent to lie abroad for the good of my country, I should welcome the chill and aridity

which would choke and smother the last spark of impulsive human feeling. But fancy making warm love, hot love, at the distance of a thousand leagues! It is a contradiction in terms; it is unthinkable. Poor Love, he is but a child, you know, and he takes cold and turns pale from too long exposure to the air. But Amor represents only the earthly element in the fathomless complexity of feelings that make a passion truly great. It is only he that absence has the least power upon; and as it is he whose footsteps are tracked by the ghastly specters of doubt, jealousy, and selfishness, perhaps the letter from which this mischief-maker is barred out will be all the more healthy and acceptable.

But, really, it is curious, the effect of great distance on the pen. When she—oh, what a lovely word that is!—when she, the one woman, is in the same town, when the very air you are inhaling may carry a trace of her sweet breath, when you know that in a trice a messenger can put a missive in her hand, why then you forget that writing is at best an artificial and roundabout mode of

expression ; and for the moment you can give it something of the gush, the fervor, and the sincerity of speech. But speech itself, ah, that is the noblest organ of the soul. How its tones haunt you, and what a thing it is to watch the birth of thought struggling into life and utterance upon the trembling lips ! Heavens ! What would your voice sound like if you spoke to one you really cared for ? I know, I feel that it is music, though I have never heard it !—think of it ! There—I have written quite a little essay on the psychology of absence, and I don't believe you are a bit grateful.

Later.—I thank you, thank you for telling me how to reach you in M. Oh, if you had seen the wild search which on Thursday, after I got those six reproachful lines, I made for the card with the addresses, and the anguish with which I realized that it must be among the letters of which I made that hideous bonfire. Heavens ! suppose I had forgotten the address. For nearly two days, until I got last night the telegram, I shook with fear lest I *had* forgotten it—had somehow got it wrong. Think of

it; suppose that those three days had stretched into three weeks, and in the whole of that eternity I could not have spoken of my contrition or prayed you, prayed you to forgive. I must stop. I must go quickly and post these poor fond words of mine, if they are to go to-night and reach you, as I would have them, with all the speed attainable by man.

Letter Thirty-first.

I have the first letter written from M., that noble letter in which you not once reproach me. Oh, you are my savior! How can you be so good to me? And you knew what I wanted you to do with my bit of ribbon. You did not keep me waiting; you did it at once, and sent it back to me. I have kissed it a hundred times in the last five minutes. It had lain on your bosom, close to the heart that I had hurt in my insanity, and which yet, which yet forgave. Ah, the runaway slave that in a burst of fury broke his fetters has come back of his own will. He has bowed his neck to a yoke more light, more sweet, more lovable

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than freedom. His collar is re-riveted, and he can shake it off no more.

I will be more careful about my health, since you care in the least about it; but really, dear, I need no physician but you. If I could see you once I should have the health of Hercules. Before knowing you I know what was the matter with me; I was literally dying of sheer emptiness of heart. It was killing me to mark that the starlit sky, a touching poem, the odors of flowers, the tones of music no longer had the power to throw me into a delicious trance. It seemed to me that the best part of me was already frozen, dead; but oh, my love! it has come back to me, you have brought it back. I can feel again the joy, the beauty, and the rapture of living. I want to live; I could not die! I am so much better than I was a month ago. It is as if some powerful elixir had been shot into my veins.

But think what a dreadful thing it is to me, whom you have given a new life as truly as if you had raised me from the dead; think what it is to learn, as I must learn from

your letters, that you are less happy for knowing me. I do not invigorate you, it seems, as you do me. I do not lift you up as you lift me. Oh, no; O God, I drag you down! What must I do, what shall I do? I can't help loving you, but I will obey you and seem calm. I must quickly master that hard lesson before I see you, for then I must be calm and even frosty, lest I hurt the delicate and shrinking petals of that rose, your heart.

I would say, The angels guard thee! but thou needest no celestial guardians. What needest thou of them? 'Tis they should kneel to thee.

Letter Thirty-second.

I have your letter from M., and the postscript—the postscript which has made a god of me. But let me wait, let me wait a moment, or I can speak of nothing else.

I telegraphed you yesterday to answer my telegrams and not my letters, because letters, sent from such a distance, are misleading. Yes, they have led me terribly astray. Listen, dear; the letter which you

posted at M. did not reach me until five or six days afterward. Then my answer to it needed three days to reach you. By that time, just because you are as bewitchingly changeful as an April sky, you might have entirely forgotten the thought, the mood, the sideward of emotion to which I gave responsive, but, alas ! belated throbs. Oh, instinct told me, that evening before you went away, that there would be something awful in the absence and the distance. Our cases, dear, were not at all the same. I have no anchor. You had, if you cared for it, for I loved you. You had my heart, and you knew it. Even when I raved against you in my agony I touched you, instead of angering, for your clear eyes read the truth. No passionette can make men rave. But I—why I—of your heart had no certainty at all. Ah, yes ; I might surprise your senses, pique them a little, make them curious to know more thoroughly a new, wild, morbid type. For I know well enough that few men can express themselves with more frightful vigor and infectious realism than I can, when I am roused. Well, to

startle and command your senses would of itself be a triumph for which men have gladly died. But you see my aim was so much deeper, more comprehensive, more aspiring ! It was your heart I wanted ; for I divined, my own heart taught me, that if I but conquered that, all the other joys would be added unto me. It was not Lucifer, but Michael, the greatest of the good archangels, who took me up into a high mountain and showed me that. No mortal, he told me, who attacks a goddess by her senses only can long detain her on the earth. She has wings, and she will spread them ; and the last lot of her lover will be more infernal than the first. Her heart, her heart, make that but yours, and she will be seized with Aurora's hunger to make you as herself, because she wished to love forever.

Ah, I knew, I knew ; but what is knowledge when hope is weak and dim ? Then came that little letter with its wonderful commingling of sweet and bitter, which at one instant drowned me in delirium and at the next shook me with horrible fore-

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boding. It was not solely or mainly your frank avowal that you knew not whether I had your heart; for it is just thinkable that a woman—even a very wise one—might have given her heart and not know it at once. No, it was not that, but something which you went on to say, that to me was pregnant and portentous. You said, "To-morrow you may do or say or think something that will rob you of your power over me, and me of an illusion." No one who cared in the least could have said that. No one who loved could. You could not do or say or think anything that would not straightway undergo transfiguration in my heart; if in another not quite beautiful, your touch would beautify it, glorify! Ah, a man who feels as I do understands why his great ancestor deemed even the plucking of that apple well done because Eve did it. Why, nothing she could do but ever to his fond eyes seemed wisest, virtuous, discreet, best. But with you, it seemed, it was not so. You would see with cool and piercing clearness; you would weigh and measure the thing

done. You would not see the one who did it, and every act of his, through the haze that love alone can generate. You could never guess, I fear, what anguish that sentence cost me, as I thought what dreadful self-denial and long martyrdom the conquest of your heart imposed. No one but you has ever made me weep—ah, no! I have been one of those that ever with a steadfast temper have been able to take the sunshine and the storm. Yet even in the middle of my sorrow—hope is, thank God, so hard to kill—there came to me a flickering faint gleam of hopefulness, as if—as if an infant's finger had touched my breast. For I remember with what infinite sweetness and forbearance you have treated me in certain crises. Caprice knows no such magnanimity. Had it been a mere caprice you felt, oh, surely, you would have smitten me, consumed me with a lightning-stroke of wrath and scorn. Ah, then ; if not caprice, what was it ? What was it made you utter those arresting, agitating, paralyzing words ? Was it, could it be a lovely modesty that sought thus to throw up a last barrier ; that

withdrew dismayed and fluttering, deep into its inmost keep? For a great lady need not be ashamed of a caprice—but to admit that her heart has surrendered—ah, that is quite a different avowal. My queen, my queen, why do you ravish me with that avowal in the postscript of that letter which I have just opened? Oh, do not bless me with one breath, only to reclaim the blessing presently. Don't you see that if you love me, if you can give to me your heart, everything for me is wholly changed? No more misgiving; it will be dead, and fear extinct. I could not, even for your sake, bar myself from you. I could not breathe apart from you.

But even as I write this I am still torn with apprehension. Who knows what may have happened since you traced those lines? For here is Wednesday noon, and I have had no second word. Oh, think of my suspense!

Letter Thirty-third.

You ought to prove a good physician, for you are wondrous learned in the lore of the heart. One might suppose that, at first sight, the worst way possible to calm a man already sufficiently excited—to give him something that had been pressed against your bosom. Yet it did calm me, and you knew it would. You knew that a man in my condition must have something to touch that had touched you. Your instinct told you by what strange cheatings the senses may be soothed and lulled. Or, it may be that you had noticed how, when an infant clamors for the breast he cannot have, they slip into his mouth a tiny bit of moistened rubber, and behold, he tugs away at it in dubious contentment, and whimpers off to sleep.

I have only had one letter written from N. Don't think I am complaining—I only mentioned it, so that you may know whether I received everything I should. I don't want you to write very often, lest

writing to me should become a sort of ball and chain.

Much later.—I had just said that, and was trying to convince myself that I believed it, when someone brought me a very little envelope that bore your handwriting. The eagerness with which I snatched it gave the lie to my protestations ; but Heavens ! I marveled my hand did not drop off. That little envelope was charged with electricity enough to kill a dozen men ; it shook every nerve-cell to an agony of ecstasy, set every drop of blood in my body to bounding, swelling, bursting, in a mad desire to spill itself.

It was the act of an angel to dispel my doubts forever. You knew that it could be done in one way only, and you took it. I believe, believe, and nothing can cloud my belief again. My God ! it is then possible. It is true that you care for me a little. Oh, there must be a God ; I have regained my faith in him. For it is not thinkable, not thinkable a child of earth should know such rapture. And, dearest, is there not something indescribably ennobling in the fact

that you and I have been drawn together in this strangest of all ways ?

I pity, don't you, those dull, common creatures who suppose the eyes to be the only transparent windows of the soul, the soul's sure channels to the heart ? Oh, we have found a passage shorter, straighter, more unerring, more delicious ; that through which Love himself leaped when he fell on Psyche in the dark. What a miracle it is that you can evoke devotion, worship, passion, merely by existing ; and what exquisite flattery to me it is that you should let me, with no other instrument than a pen, touch in return your proud, sweet heart. Why, this is the finest and most admirable thing in all the long history of lovers. I take back those gifts I made of you to those men, more happy in that posthumous blessing than ever they were in their lives. Not one of them shall have thee ; they could not love as well as I. Good-night ! That little letter lies like a red-hot coal now close to my heart, my darling.

Letter Thirty-fourth.

I did intend to write to you about your mind to-night, because I was determined to invigorate; but the postman has been here, and I have changed my mind.

I follow still the changes of the moon. She draws the tides in woman's mystic nature, and you draw me. I shall begin with the wrong end, the less lovely end of your longer letter. As for the little note, the only, only letter worthy of the name that ever in my life set my eyes to swimming, that I must keep to the last; should I even think of it now, I should have to throw down this pen.

I wonder that you don't more often misunderstand my letters, that there are not more words left out or wrong ones slipped in, for I have never read over a single sentence, much less a paragraph, of what I have written to you; it would seem shocking to me. When I am obscure, ah, you must guess me, darling! I cannot help you. Guess, since you have the wisdom as well as the beauty of a goddess,

As for what you say about recognizing a perfume, it isn't worthy of you. You willfully misunderstand me. I had to speak of those other letters in order to explain the impression which yours made. You ordered me to do so. It is not generous to impute to me a cheap and vulgar affectation. But, alas! although a goddess, you are a woman, and I thank God you are.

How could those people so misjudge you? Would that I might build an altar fit for your white feet to rest upon. In all that I said to them there was not one word, not one phrase which I did not think to be the truth—ah, so much less than the truth—but less I had to say for your sake, my love, my love. If there is a cabal against you, it is that dog A. who has instigated it; I think I may well guess why. What joy I take in insulting him! But your name I cannot hear without a flush. I had a proof only this morning that my power of self-control is strangely weak where you are concerned. As a rule I take off my collar, fearing to ruffle and rumple it as I lie tossing in my bed; but last night I kept it on. I had

had distress enough that day, and I thought it would soothe me. This morning, when my man came to give me my bath, "You have a string, sir, round your neck," he said. I felt, I know, that I got crimson, and I untied it in a hurry. Now, if I have no more self-command than this before a servant, it behooves me to so act that nothing shall cloud the clearness and straightforwardness of my look.

Good-by, good-by! I thank you for the way you addressed this last letter.

Letter Thirty-fifth.

You say, in speaking of the "Kreutzer Sonata," "I have read that terrible book. I do not shrink from acknowledging it. I have read it, and you are all wrong, all wrong. Why should an agonized confession, wrung from the repentant murderer Posdnicheff—saved from death only by a quibble of the law—be the expression of the personal experience of that great moralist and poet, Tolstoi? I am amazed at you. Why so misjudge him? Could the author of 'Anna Karenina' not have known love,

yea and all things? Why should an appeal for purity of morals in men before, nay, during marriage, so scandalize the world? What hypocrisy! Tolstoi is a happy husband and a loving father. He has not chilled or killed his wife. This book paints coarse animal propensities, unrelieved by one spark of intellect, one gleam of high aspiration, in a life spent idly without regular engrossing and healthful occupation—where could they lead unless to despair and to crime? A frightful portraiture, but true—*true*. And if more probable in the Slav than in the Saxon temper, it is possible even here. Its warnings should be heeded."

I beg your pardon, I daresay you are right . . . but do such books reach their purposes? Do they not rather produce depression and hopelessness in minds striving to uplift themselves? I know not. I can only say that it depressed me. Grave questions these we will discuss anon. You say that, "There is one mistake the great Russian makes when he says that a pure young girl wants children—children, not a lover. This is not true; *a girl does not want chil-*

dren, nor does she dislike the thought of them. That is all vague to her—a matter of indifference. What she does want is the lover, not the husband, the lover—that ‘homage of the dim boudoir,’ which so often marriage forfeits.”

Yes, you are right—and also in what you say—that “man, through his sensuality, makes woman his enemy, not his ally.”

. . . Not even to spare you annoyance, or shield myself from your displeasure, could I ever tell you an untruth. Then I should feel even more utterly unworthy of a kind thought from you than I do now. I am not a good man, Heaven knows, but I can, at least, admire the paradise that a seraphic wisdom had made of Peru before the Spaniard spoiled it. You know, I dare say—you know everything—that the Incas framed a penal code of unparalleled simplicity. They began by decreeing the fundamental law, “He that uttereth the thing that is not, shall surely be put to death.” After this law had been mercilessly enforced for generations, they discovered that they needed

no other penal statutes. The lie extinct, all crime was dead.

It was a tender heart that prompted you to ask me certain questions. Ah, you know how to chasten and purify the man that loves you.

My mother! How strange it is! I seldom, very seldom, speak of her. I have not, until lately, thought of her so often as I ought. But it is sweet to speak of her to you. It is she that whispers to you when I am at my best, and throb responsive only to the noblest and best element of the complex, all-embracing feeling that you have kindled in my breast.

At other times I think it is my father—and the far worse man that life has made of me—whom you hear when you tell me that it is poison I distill.

Ah, that was an ideal marriage! No wonder that I have been chasing love's counterfeits; for, indeed, I was love's child. I believe that two human beings never gave themselves to one another with such utter self-surrender; and I was the first-born. He died young. She lingered for two

years, and then died at twenty-three. She had the face of a Madonna, and I know she had the soul of one; for long afterward, when I was able to weep over them, I read some letters which she had kept during her short married life, and which, so long as she was living, no eye but hers had seen. Through the two years after she had lost him she was always praying, praying—he was not religious, he was more like me, but he loved her—that at last, in the hour of dissolution, her faith might become his. The poor soul shuddered at the thought that in the heaven she was bound to, she might seek him piteously, wildly, and not find.

For me, too, she was always praying, for me! But there is no God, no God that answereth a prayer. Yet I have thought that sometimes of late she has looked upon me with a smile, a smile sad and wistful as a tear; but yet a smile, as she saw me once more yearning for things noble and things beautiful.

Her . . . I saw but once. So young I was that I can only remember seeing her that once; that morning when my nurse

took me up to the darkened chamber, and drew down the white cloth shrouding the eyes now closed forever. And I screamed, and knew not why. Oh! my tears are falling on this paper. Take those, dear, take those! . . .

. . . Was I once heard to say that Myra was nicer than Gwendolen? It must have been in a hopeless, disappointed mood, when it seemed to me that rather with those pale, soft-eyed seraphs than with the women that enslave would men find heaven's peace. Ah, had I painted what you have painted, over and over again would I say to myself, "Is it possible that I have done this?"

Ah! could I but have known you ten years ago, I might by this time have done something of which I should not feel ashamed. But it is not too late. I am ten years younger than Cæsar was at Pharsalia, and not a day older than he was when he wept that as yet he had accomplished nothing. Just think! he had done nothing but flirt with women and get into debt before he was fifty.

Farewell! beloved, forget me not, and remember that I only live in you.

Letter Thirty-sixth.

Let me set that proud and tender heart at rest forever on two points. Would that I could as easily clear my mind of a misgiving which a little word you dropped once has caused to haunt me. Happily, I can set your heart at rest, beloved, without altering or veiling the truth by so much as a shade; and I am so glad of that, for I want to keep your respect.

I have never in my life had any letters—until I began to receive some in a certain handwriting—that I cared to read more than twice, and not one for years that I have read but once. But these others, oh, these others! There is not one of them that I have not read over a dozen times, and some a hundred times. What else could I do? There is no woman breathing, I think none ever breathed, who could write such letters. Heavens! How much culture, wisdom, genius, poetry, romance is there commingled, by an unheard-of alchemy, with how much

fire, vitality, and passion! Oh, some of those letters would call a man back from the grave. "His heart would hear them and beat, were it earth in an earthy bed." I thank God that through them I have known an angel's visits, though they have been short, too short, and woe is me! perhaps not meant to last. For you said once—I can forget nothing—that about your own constancy you had grave doubts. Of course you have, of course you have; but what a dreadful thought for me! But I must not dwell on that. Let me be happy for a little time. The night will come.

And now listen, and believe while I answer the other question. It is true, as I once told you, that I never write letters. In twenty years I have not written so many letters as I have in the last few weeks. Even when I ought, in common gentleness and decency, I write but very little. But it was not so much of the quantity as of the kind of letters you were thinking. On that score, too, you have no cause for doubt. When I said that sometimes I could express myself with vigor and infectious

realism, I was not thinking of letters at all. I had in mind certain attacks I had made on men. Ah, I can cut to the bone. But I never before wanted to use power to win and not to wound. Never in my life had I written one letter which I should care if all the world should see. I know not what prophetic instinct made me so reserved and frigid in my style. It is the same instinct that has always made me shrink from mentioning so much as a lady's name in talk with other men. And even of those that were not ladies I have never allowed myself to speak, except with reticence and a semblance of respect. Ah, the men who really know me could tell you a strange thing about me. I am not a bit better than others; perhaps not half so good—you think not—and yet they would tell you that never was a coarse word heard to pass my lips; and that no man ever ventured more than once to tell such stories as men sometimes tell, in my presence. But it is true, oh, it is true that when a man is utterly in love there is no such thing as impurity; everything is beautiful, etherealized, glorified.

There is no mad dream of passion which does not seem worthy of a god. It is strange, is it not, that I should have kept always that outward purity and modesty? You will understand the mournful contradictions of my life if you remember the scene I once revealed to you, when a poor little child of five, a little golden-haired boy, realized in one awful moment that he was cast helpless upon a brutal world. I was pitched into a boarding-school no worse than others—all are bad. Oh, don't, don't tell me I have lost something I never can regain! Ah, many and many a sad night of late I have sobbed and sobbed and sobbed in anguish to think I was not better. Ah, take me, take me as I am! There are still left in me some stirrings, yearnings, echoes of what I might have been, and what, alas! you wish I was.

Letter Thirty-seventh.

I do not believe to-night that I ever shall see you. How delighted you will be to kill my hope! Well, I have your picture to comfort me. You cannot rob me of that. It

has been a great comfort to me during the last few days. I am not so much afraid of the mouth and chin as I was at first. Nevertheless, I am in a sufficiently timorous and abject condition.

Apropos of abjectness, I saw a photograph of the Czarina lately. The thought ran through my head, "This mistress of all the Russias looks as if she too might have a slender foot, but she could never set it on my neck. That is pre-empted."

Has not a letter miscarried? You speak of having inclosed in one something about your little dog. I have never received that. If you are quite certain that you sent it, will you not tell me when and how, whether by post or servant; then I will investigate.

Later, 1 A. M.—Ah, it is literally true that at this instant I arise from dreams of thee.

I have wondered why I did not always dream of one, while sleeping, from whom, in my waking hours, I never can escape. Perhaps it was a blind, sullen effort of nature to relieve the heart and brain; but

if so, my will at last has subdued the incident of reaction, and I trust that henceforth you will never be absent.

I have read your letter of yesterday a hundred times. There is a part of it which grieves me the more the oftener I read it, but I will not reproach you; I could not frame the words. I only say to myself sadly, "Of how slow a growth is trustfulness!" You see, dear, you began with a strong warp and decided bias against me, and since I will not lie to you—I would as soon think of lying to God—it is a hard and Sisyphean labor to conquer preconception and rehabilitate myself a little in your eyes. Alas, I may not even peep over a fence which others may jump over. That is a part of my punishment.

What do I expect of a woman? I don't expect anything of "a" woman; for experience has taught me that I should be disappointed. But all that I could wish of one woman is that she should simply be herself, and that is you.

You speak of Myra, you speak of Deronda; he never interested me, I cannot

even understand him. He is a woman's man. I say it not invidiously, but scarcely any of George Eliot's men are vital. But about Myra ; she is the Madonna type. Of course she of Bethlehem was just such a Jewess. No man fit to live at all could fail to worship her ; but how could there possibly be any hunger in the worship ? Not only would one be upon one's knees, but the head would be dropped, not lifted. One would be content to know her with the ear, and not the eye. One would never feel a wild impulse to look up and let one's gaze wander longer, fastened on her face or on her figure.

Gwendolen ? a hundredfold more human and therefore more lovable. That sweet passion was invented to glorify poor human clay. I despise Deronda for not loving her. What was he made of ? Marble ? Snow ? Great Heavens ! couldn't the man's soul find scope and spur enough for vibration and expansion in her contrition, aspiration, agony, despair ? And was she not fair to see, and is that nothing, nothing to a man ?

But, ah! that searching, piercing question that you put to me in that same letter! "Was it with my heart or my intellect that I revered nobility and exaltedness?" Oh, it is miraculous that a woman should be able to sink a shaft like that down to the roots of a man's nature. Ah, how some people must dread your eyes! I fear them not. Let them plunge in me as deep as ever plummet sounded, and they can discover nothing but love, dear—love for you. That question—it made me probe and ransack myself as nothing in my life had done. Could I have had such shaking, stimulating questions put to me ten years ago, I would by this time have achieved something deserving your respect. Even though I have pondered it long and anxiously, I have not yet managed to answer it; but I will find the answer, and you shall have it, no matter how it may damage me in your esteem. There is nothing could damage me irreparably in my own eyes but to deceive you.

Now I am going to lie down again and take your last letter, oh, my beloved,

sweetest, dearest darling, with me. Good-night!

Later.—Oh, there was another passage in that letter which ravished me, plunged me in a frenzy. Tell me, tell me, did you also intend that? You must mean what you accomplish. Your touch is too sure, too infallible, too resistless not to be meant. My God, how can one of thy creatures have such stupendous power over another? Why, with a word, an image, a vision evoked on paper, you can do more with men than Argive Helen could with her embraces.

I didn't mean to rave again like this. I will be invigorating. I shall write you to-morrow only about your talent.

Letter Thirty-eighth.

Of course I shall come. I could not disobey you, but I would if I could; for think what you have said, "We must not meet often." How, then, am I to live? How can people say such things? I could not. Ah, can you not see, for a man with such a heart as mine, to see you once and scarcely

any more would be death? I sometimes wonder how God measures us mortals, and whether, looking down, he does not think me too good for any woman. Believe me, his rules of judgment must be different from ours. I shall seem cold because I am a little afraid of you. Yes, you divined it; but that is just the reason why I must go. A man must do the things he is afraid of. Oh, you hurt me when you tell me that I am so poor a masker that even fools would see what I feel. I thought myself so skillful. I am ashamed, ashamed. I fear to harm you. Oh, I don't want to go and see you—I don't—I don't—but I must.

CHAPTER II.

IT was some fatality that took me to her house on that very afternoon, and I know it was an accident by which I was admitted. Someone evidently was expected; but I felt, as men of some experience feel, instinctively—men who know something of feminine intricacies—that it was not I. As I ascended the stairs I heard the butler whisper a word of reproof to the footman in the hall, and the little dog, who sat on one leg warming his nose by the fire, snapped and growled in sympathetic reprobation.

I noticed, too, that the hand which I raised to my lips on entering was a trifle cold. Her graceful back was reflected in the looking-glass, with the coil of her dusky hair. She moved forward a step or two to greet me in her suave accents.

There was always something peculiar about her voice, something which suggested

nature—nature as one feels her influences in the drowsy hum of insects on summer nights, in the twitter of birds in the leaves, in the beating assonance of waves on the shore, the flutter in the glad meadows, the gayety of sunlit fields. There were grave notes and measured ones, and then sudden vibrations, as of the gurgling kamichi in the forest branches, at the time of its love making. "A sweet, low voice," people said, speaking of her. Insufficient adjectives!

She seated herself on the sofa, and I found a chair near to her. We fell to talking of common things—of the world, its obligations, its exactions. I told her I was deputed to organize a party on winter pleasures bent, which I hoped that she would honor us by joining. We were to pass a few days for the carnival at Montreal; thence wing a rapid flight through Canada's frozen plains to the coast.

"Ah, yes; Mrs. Heathcote invited me, but I don't know what is the matter, I have an ungregarious fit on, Mr. Milburn."

"Is it the detaining brush?"

"Not a bit. I am doing nothing at my

work now, nothing. No ; who knows ? Perhaps I am indolent, or perhaps I am falling in love ?" She posed this as a question, with an ascending inflection, arrested on her lip.

"I don't believe a word of it. Mrs. Heathcote herself is not more impregnable."

"Ah, dear Antoinette, she is not the creature the world thinks her ! And you have the Greshams, too, *n'est-ce pas ?* Who is the fair Constance destroying now ? I hear, however, she is reforming. And Norah Eustis—Horace is in the West I think—will she be one of you ? Take care, Mr. Milburn ; if Constance is veiling her lovely eyes I believe Norah's are opening of late."

"So Mrs. Maury was telling me."

"Ah, Nelly, your cousin. There's *chic* for you ! I adore Nelly. She has been beating at my door for a fortnight, and I have denied myself. I am afraid of Nelly. There is no resisting the creature. If I had opened to her, I would have been half-way to Canada already."

"Well, why not?"

"Why not? Why not? Why, I ask *you*, and for all answer you say I am impregnable."

"Ah, yes, and impenetrable, as you women must be whom the world treats well. Why should you be aught else, pray, but amiable and calm? Nelly is another, not much like you, though. Nelly's ideas of art would be the Trianon and marble fountains and the matter of a Watteau frock or two; while one feels that your watchwords, Mrs. Moncrief, would be nature and passion."

"Ah! I like that! Thank you. Yes, I can well fancy that Mrs. Maury's and my artistic convictions would differ. But so few of us can follow out our own ideas. Balked individuality leads to revolt. I am a *révoltée*." She sighed.

"You are a success."

"Yet the prudes will have none of me. They were shocked at my last study of the dancing nymph. Do you remember it?"

"That poem—yes. Prudes! Do you fancy that their tirades lie in the province of ethics, as they claim? Depend upon it,

hysteria is their disease. They foam at the mouth because some women are lovable and men tell them so. It is a pill that should be administered to them, not a lecture. Why, they don't know the depth of their wound until a careless finger has probed it. Depend upon it, the prudes are recruited from the ranks of the unloved."

She laughed. "I believe you must be right; I have sometimes thought so. So you recommend me to go on my own way?"

"Why, of course, since this means not only peace and health and progress, but ascent." Through all this *persiflage* I had remarked a note of febrile agitation, and the frequent movement of a pretty head toward a curtained doorway. The portière stirred; the butler's burly visage appeared between its folds. "Mr. Thornton," he announced.

She turned to me, "We have not met before, you know," she said. "You must present your friend." And I believed her although it puzzled me, for I fancied that her bosom rose and fell too quickly

where the roses were, and that these paled a little near her heart.

I can see her now, standing to receive him, by the side of a great pot of tall lilies. The flowers almost shielded her from the glance of the newcomer. Never had I seen her so womanly before. For there were those who accused her brilliancy of coldness. Upon me Mrs. Moncrief had never made an impression of coldness, only of being a little weary—weary of the emotions she inspired, of that hot breath, as of the desert, which had always surrounded her steps, stirring in her more lassitude than answering emotion. If evil had brushed that pure forehead, it had left little trace. And the depths her eyes revealed—whose study might become perilous—told no story of her own past. Yet a man would fain have read their mysteries, even if it brought to him but hopelessness.

Thornton came in quickly, with the movement of one who should fall at a woman's feet, but, seeing me, he paused an instant, as if discomfited or embarrassed. She advanced and they touched each other's fin-

gers—no more. I looked from her to him. He had entered with a smile upon his face, but now I saw it change, and in its stead there swept an expression of distress and of anxiety. He seemed to seek in her some assurance which he found not, the crowning of some hope long nursed, cruelly denied.

“Would Galatea remain upon her pedestal forever, while he gazed up at her?” I asked myself this question, lingering. I knew I ought to go, I saw it; yet, in my rôle of student of humanity, am I to blame if I stopped a minute, while these two beings of such high instincts, such rare intelligence, looked at and gauged each other. “How captivating it would be!” I thought, “should he become the master of what is highest in this woman? what proud conquest would he make of this strange soul of hers! Would he not win her by surprising her? and should he possess that wayward spirit, would he not leave his mark upon it? make it his forever?”

And then I took pity upon him—upon them both. I looked up my hat and cane

and said "Good-night." They did not bid me stay. I left them thus, together and alone.

Letter Thirty-Ninth.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT.

I don't know what to think; I am torn asunder. Sometimes I am ravished with delight when I look at that little handkerchief, when I seize it, kiss it, crush it against my face, inhale its scent, which is so strangely new and deadly sweet to me. And is it true that I have touched that flowerlike thing, your hand, my goddess and my queen? seen you at last! in all your splendor and your beauty! But the earth-born are insensate. I fell to thinking of what you would not give, of what you would not do; and then I dropped at once from the fifth—no, the seventh heaven—down to the depths of misery. For I saw, oh yes, I saw too plainly that it was but my mind you liked; that you—when you had taken a searching look at me—and your looks were searching although swift—that

you were disappointed. And you said, "I would rather he should write to me than see him." Ah, yes; you did say that to your kind heart. Ah, you may like my intellect a little, but you find that you can't like me. Yes, that is what you mean. Alas, how can you? I do not blame you in the least. And so I was too nice to tell you what I remembered, that a lovely lady had said to me, that she would, when she saw me, touch my forehead with her hand. You would have been near me then, I would have drunk your breath. . . It was a dream, but give me such dreams above all realities, such realities as I yet have known. But I love you a hundred times more than I did yesterday, since I have seen you. Oh, what a dreadful fate that is, to love you more! When I left you I could not come home. There was something too commonplace about the associations of my house. I told the man who was driving me to take me up the river. I sat for hours gazing out upon the water, thinking of you, trying to puzzle out the secret of your sweet ways; but I can't,

you are too enchantingly deep for me.
The Sphinx will slay me, I foresee it.

When am I to see you again? May I come? Say that I may; but when, when, when, when? And then, for God's sake be alone.

Yours,

H. T.

Letter Fortieth.

SUNDAY, MIDNIGHT.

I went to bed at eight o'clock this evening; think of it! And I have just wakened from a deep, refreshing sleep. Ah, you are indeed a wonderful physician. When I recall the horrible restlessness and wakefulness of the last week, when every nerve would quiver with anxiety and suffering, such happy slumber seems incredible. How wondrous, how awful, when one thinks of it, is the part the spirit plays in the life of man. Between *us* it has been *all*. It has needed but one soft touch on your part—no, the word is not sufficiently ærial—but a breath, a thought, a gentle impulse to work a revolution in the whole being of

another. Oh, how could you wrong yourself by saying once that you were not "very gentle"? Why, you are an angel of compassion.

That I could not sleep much Saturday night, though I had that precious letter under my pillow, seems a strange contradiction. I was in a blissful swoon all that afternoon. You had stooped suddenly from heaven, and whispered something that was like—oh, it was like a kiss. But Saturday night, what with reading over passages in some of your letters, over and over and over again—to reassure myself that my eyes had not mocked me, and that the words were really there—and what with writing to you, and, all at once, thinking of your beauty—something wrought me up to a terrible excitement, and I lay awake for hours in the dark, shivering and staring. But to-day and to-night I have felt a strange and delicious peace. Yes, love indeed has his languors as well as his raptures, and I know not which is the more blissful. Oh, dearest, dearest, dearest, in how many ways I love you! There are

times when I worship you as if you were a saint, and to me you are a saint. There are others when I seem able to feel nothing but a wild hunger to see your face, to hear your voice, to touch your hand. I know not which mood be sweeter. They are both divine.

What was the impression made on me by your first letter, the very first that came to me last summer? You see I do not need to keep your letters to remember every question. It was not because I feared to forget a word of them that I grieved so over their ashes, last Friday night. It was because I used to like to gaze at your handwriting, and wonder how you looked when you wrote this or that; whether a faint smile wreathed your lips, or your brows were curved in a soft frown. And then it sometimes seemed, when I pressed the pages in my hands, that you could somehow feel the pressure. But that letter! Ah, there are strange presentiments. I remember well the day I found it perched upon a pile of books. There was a tinge in it that coaxed the eye; the

lightest suggestion of a scent that I liked but did not recognize. I scanned the superscription ; you know I had not seen your handwriting then. I had not dreamed that you would answer my little note. This, I thought, is the letter of a woman of refinement. I tore it open and glanced swiftly at the signature. "Ah," I said, "it is she !" How I had thought about you ! wondered ! how I thought and wondered now ! "Let me see," I said, "how much I can divine from this note ; how much her paint-brush has not taught me. With all their art they are not quite so inscrutable as men can be."

Your face I had pictured to myself. Don't smile ; your height baffled me. Were you tall ? I detest short women. Ah, you are tall, divinely tall. I probed and weighed your every syllable, pored over this little note, and then took up my pen and wrote the stiffest and coldest reply that I could frame.

Is it possible this can interest you ? It is full of interest to me. But you did not guess I could talk so long, I fear, in answer

to your careless question. Some other time I will tell you when you first wounded me ; I see now that you meant not to wound, but you did.

Later.—Your letter has come. There are things in it I cannot speak of—I have become a slave—you can say anything insulting, cruel to me now. I can never answer back any more, never say a word in protest or defense. I am almost glad to have you bruise me. To bear without wince or outcry seems the only thing that I can do for you. And when you are unjust I feel not quite so downcast, so heart-stricken at my unworthiness. I say with a sad joy, “She is not perfect !”

I would never tell her that I doubted, though I have a hundred times more cause, and though God knows my soul is shaken and sick with doubt. Let me speak no other word of that ; no, nor about another thing—your going away. My heart would burst. Ah, let me be as those condemned ones in the land Cortez won. They who meant to slay them never told them the day they were to die. They honored them

meanwhile, and feasted them, and bade them mark, in their wild revelry, how blithe is earthly life.

Must I tell you in so many words what you know, and I have said a thousand times, that I have long been discouraged, disillusioned and lonely with a loneliness that appalls and freezes like the tomb? But let me say no more. . . The past is past. Here is the present; the present, when I know only that I love you, love you, love you—Ah, does the word enter your heart as it empties mine? love you with every fiber of my body, every outflash of my intellect, every pulsation of my soul.

Will I go to you anywhere where I may see you, speak to you, and perhaps clasp your hand? Do you ask it? Do you ask me whether I will go to Paradise?

Letter Forty-first.

MY DEAR MADAME :

With your gracious permission, I will forego the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow, or at any time hereafter. I perceive that I made a profound mistake when

I urged you to see me. I should have been content to do what no intelligent and right-minded man could fail to do—admire your intellect and appreciate your heart. I will confine myself hereafter to these methods of regarding you ; but they are of course incompatible with the gratification of the sense of sight. I have been for some hours reflecting on certain incidents, and it is really curious how near I can come to the truth, when I take the trouble to think long and deeply. I am very far from asserting that your senses would never be stirred nor your passions inflamed beyond the point of complete and utterly exemplary control. I am quite too well-trained a logician to base a conclusion on a particular experience. Because I could not make you love me as women love when they really love, it does not in the least follow that another may not. That other I certainly should consider highly enviable ; but as envy is a feeling uncongenial to my nature, I shall endeavor to extirpate it with all possible promptitude.

I hope that in a few days, or in a week

at furthest, you will allow me to write to you on topics entirely unconnected with any personal, selfish desires of mine. It will take a little time to entirely tranquilize, clarify, and cool my mind. I have heard of you as a woman who had made many conquests, who had great knowledge of the human heart. I congratulate you. You are entirely at liberty to count me among the former; but kindly place me in the sub-class that considered conquest sufficient, and rebelled against torture.

I will never—so help me God!—look upon your face again. You will be wholly free for the future from my importunities.

Believe me, dear madame, with unshakable respect and admiration, and—if you will permit me to add—unvarying friendship,

Sincerely yours,

HUBERT THORNTON.

Letter Forty-second.

Do not expect me, neither to-day nor any other time. Although you seem incredulous, my letter expressed a deliberate and inflexible resolve.

I pray you will not misunderstand me. I have arraigned myself in the forum of my own judgment. I have passed sentence on myself and it will be executed. Two or three times in my life I have had occasion to look suddenly and with great closeness at a situation, and tell myself what it behooved me to do, if I desired to retain my self-respect. My will has not, as some persons might imagine, lost its grip, and I have always been able to do what I saw I ought to do to escape self-contempt.

I agree with all wise people in desiring to lead a dignified life. I perceive that I should inevitably become ridiculous. I prefer to retire to safe ground. There is one stage upon which I positively have made my last appearance. I am paying you a great compliment. I know I am, however you may regard it, whether with amusement, or with annoyance at seeing the fly escape the spider; for when I renounce the hope of being loved by you I shall continue the most loyal and indefatigable of friends. Of this you will get by and by convincing

proof. That was the relation which, if I mistake not, you have always preferred; and there is no doubt that it is the most sane, the most wholesome, and perhaps most profitable to both. . . If you wish me to speak to L. I will certainly do so. If you dread his tongue it is enough. But as for me, really I love to hear the buzzing of an enemy; it is music in my ear. I have several times in my life had cause to say with *Othello*, when they told him that *Brabantio* and all of *Desdemona's* relatives were about to arraign him before the Council of Ten :

Let them do their spite :
My services which I will do the signiory
Shall out-tongue their complaint.

Poor L. He is no *Brabantio*, for *Brabantio* was a senator ; but since you wish it I will say something to him. I will ask him to dine.

With an homage profounder than I feel for any human being, and with the most devoted and unshakable friendship, believe me, dear lady,

Sincerely yours.

Letter Forty-third.

Of course my feeling has never wavered. It is burnt into my heart, soul, and body. It will live with me, but not die with me.

I know not how you could have misunderstood, but you are the noblest woman that ever lived, the purest and the noblest. I thank you for your infinite compassion . . . I sent the handkerchief back because you said farewell forever, and I have always told you that a word from you would suffice.

You have saved me; oh thank you, thank you! You little know my heart—Make L. show you a letter which I wrote to him an hour ago. Even under sentence of perpetual exile I have but one thought, to serve you. I was faithful—why not? We need must love the highest when we see it.

Letter Forty-fourth.

Dearest, dearest, I am coming at nine o'clock. I cannot write another word. Oh, I thank you, thank you for the flowers. I understood them. Are they not a summons?

Letter Forty-fifth.

I had gone out this morning to try and find a few poor violets. I wanted to send you something, for I simply could not write. When I came home I found your note; and now I must write, I feel such a brute. I will never, never say an ungentle word to you again. When I wrote that last word I was mad with disappointment, I had fallen into great despair. I wonder will you understand exactly what my feelings were; for sometimes you seem to know what I am feeling before I speak, and you write under precisely the same impulse. It is as if a thought could scarcely take shape in my mind without its fellow thought being born in yours. Had you been a little kinder to me on Wednesday, I should not have had that dreadful sinking of the heart yesterday. You had been kind, but not half so kind as you had said you would be. Ah, I know it is not nice to remind you of those sweet words of yours—I only do it to explain myself—I never will admit that I remember them again—but compared with

them you were cold ; don't you think you were? And to what could I ascribe the refrigeration except to your having been disappointed when you looked at me and compared me with the man who wrote you the letters which you had sweetly said you liked? I cannot be surprised at it. But it is a terribly bitter thing to me, who found you a thousand times more fascinating, more maddening than I had thought or dreamed you. . . . Well, with these misgivings racking me, shall you be angry if I tell you that I asked myself whether your indisposition was not feigned to enable you to adjourn indefinitely a meeting for which you found you cared but little? You had looked to me the very goddess of health. Your scarlet lips were like twin flames, and your eyes positively radiated ; and though, of course, my intellect did not for a second dispute that now you were ill, my heart could not avoid a faint shiver of distrust. Ah, as you once said so truly, affection is one thing and love is quite another. Distrust, doubt, suspicion, restlessness, are the inseparable symptoms of the

real malady; a malady indeed it is, a malady for which there is no remedy. Possession is a palliation of its deepest miseries, perhaps, then, it may be that one would have complete faith—just for a little while—but the torture would begin again. Torture! Yes! but terrible as I find it, I would rather feel it than any so-called pleasure that another human being could bestow.

Letter Forty-sixth.

AFTER MIDNIGHT.

I did not think I could love you better than I did, and yet, since our explanation this afternoon, I do. Heavens! no man ever loved a woman as much as I love you. No one could, because there never was such a woman. I have read history, as very few have read it, to find the women in it. That is why it is interesting to hear me talk history. That is why you feel blood and life in it. And I know there has never lived a woman like you.

After leaving you, I had to drive out to the country. Whenever I have been happy near you, I crave motion, air, a wide hori-

zon, the things that eagles have. And when I came home, I shut myself up and pulled out your portrait, and I gloated over it. Oh, the thought that this magnificent creature, this radiant goddess actually should care for me a little, filled me with such intoxication that I almost lost my reason. . . . Say it again to me, darling, say it again! Plunge me into ecstasy . . . I have been dreaming of you such sweet dreams! We were wandering in some lotus land of enchantment, where all things spoke of love and summer. Ah, I loved you . . . Yes, your talents are virile, they are, indeed; but all the rest, your heart and body, is so intensely witchingly, maddeningly feminine. You exhale love; you are a flower. I should think that all little birds and lovely insects, like butterflies, must circle round you in the spring-time.

In what new dress, in what new guise will she meet me to-morrow? I know not—I may not recognize her at first, but surely I shall say, "This is some daughter of Zeus that blazes thus upon my vision!"

A demain, peerless one.

Letter Forty-Seventh.

AT NIGHT, 2.30.

I have not slept. I have got up to speak to you. I can find only this scrap of paper and no pen. How lovely you looked to-day! the loveliest woman upon the earth to me. And what a voice you have, and what airiness, grace, sweetness of speech. Ah, if I were blind I must have loved you. Yet I have never puzzled myself with seeking to discover the secret of your strange power over me. I am satisfied to feel it; I don't want to know. The very thought of trying to analyze you is shocking to me. It would seem sacrilegious. I would not exchange one little word from you, no, nor your littlest finger, for all that the next loveliest could say or give. I simply love you, *love* you. You make me understand all the foolish, beautiful, impossible, preposterous things that men have done for love. I comprehend human life as it is and will be so incomparably better for knowing you. You might cast me off to-morrow, as I dare say you will, and I should still feel myself

deeply grateful to you for the thoughts and emotions and wishes that you have evoked. Whatever happens I shall never be the same man hereafter that I was before. You have made me think better, not only of all womankind, but of the whole human race. God bless you!

Later.—You were *en beauté* to-day; you knew it. You will be resplendent at the ball, and alas! I shall not see you.

Listen, dearest, you believe, do you not, for you have told me so, that I am free from little egotisms. Well, if you do think that, why is it—don't be illogical—why is it that you can't believe me capable of unselfish love? I am capable, and I will prove it to you some day, if you drive me to it by those doubts that kill me. What a fate is mine! never to have known love until now, and now not to be believed. Try to have faith in me; you will not be sorry. Remember you have no right to think of anything but the present and the future. Good-by! but it shall be only, shall it not, for a little while? In this letter I send you my whole heart. Oh

do not tear it up and throw it into the street.

Letter Forty-Eighth.

You will have torn up my last letter. I know it does not exist now. Yet I meant to write gently ; I did, I think, but coldly. A man cannot refresh anguish without ice. I think it was rather noble not to tell you that I was literally plunged into despair. I am ashamed, ashamed to acknowledge that of late, during the last six or eight weeks, I have searched feverishly the papers, in the hope that I might see your name. You know what I saw yesterday. . . . Let me tell you that I tasted the agony of death. I could not breathe at all. I rushed into the open air, and walked miles, trying to collect my senses. You had told me one thing, and here I saw recorded another. "O God!" I thought, "there is no such thing as truth upon this earth. There is no woman in the world, not one, in whom a man can put his faith. I was right when I said that morally there was not one nice enough for me. I was

glad that I was going to be free for a few days from what seemed a dreadful, shameful thralldom.

That absence which I had looked forward to with a sinking heart seemed to offer a hope of a short escape, a short release.

Ah, let me tell you that the very foundations of the earth seemed to have given way. "How can I," I cried, "love a woman who would do that?" And yet I knew I did love her; that bruise my hands against my chain as I might, I could never, never, never rend it off.

The tears gushed from my eyes. It seemed to me that even my manhood was gone, my pride, the only prop I had, was lost.

But look, I had the strength to tell you not a syllable of this. I never would have told you, did I not know to-day that the man or woman who penned that story lied. Oh, yes, he lied; you tell me so, and I must always believe you. May God leave me this little gleam of trust. When I cease to believe you I shall be that awful wreck—a man who cannot help loving one whom he

cannot respect. You will not chide or blame me, I think, now that I have told you all.

It breaks my heart to think of you as ill; you who are always the embodiment and the picture of pure health. Oh, dearest, darling, eat something for my sake. Drink the milk your physician orders; get well, get well quickly, for my sake. I command it! You will, you can do it, for in so exquisitely organized a being the soul can well command the body. Say to yourself, "He loves me, and he wishes it; I will get well; I am well."

Letter Forty-nine.

Of course I want to see every line in which your name is mentioned; even if I do not always like the substance of what you send me. But I cannot say that I revel in this incident. Yet I love the delicious womanly nature that prompted you to send it. Oh, what an exquisite piece of femininity you are! There never was anything so sweetly, so beguilingly, so entrancingly feminine as you are in heart, soul, and

body, in your instincts and impulses, in gait and gesture, in all your looks and ways and thoughts and feelings. Oh, you were made to bless the man whom you should deign to care for! Cleopatra, Marie Stuart, Marguerite de Valois were kitchen maids to you. The man whom the splendid Héloïse lets her deep eyes dwell upon may well be mad with pride as well as love. I am devoured with both passions. Don't you wish it to be so? But perhaps you don't. Perhaps you would rather have me answer your questions. Let me try then, dearest, to please you in that way.

George Meredith's style? His style is simple and lucid enough in dialogue, and it used to be in narrative when, in 1858, he published his first story, "Evan Harrington." But since, and more and more, whenever he speaks in his own person, he has chosen to be gnarled, occult, inscrutable, oracular; and naturally, readers are annoyed, as they are in the case of Browning, to find that the kernel really is not worth the difficulty of cracking the shell. When one comes to think of it, who is Meredith

and who is Browning that they should not take the trouble to make themselves as intelligible at a glance, to persons of moderate parts, like myself, for instance, as Shakspeare, Milton, Victor Hugo, Pascal, Virgil, and Homer are? It is sheer laziness or ridiculous conceit, or a mixture of both, and verily they have their reward; for they lose, now and hereafter, nine-tenths of the readers they might have had. Fame in the highest sense cannot be theirs. To get fame you must be intelligible to more than a little knot of patient, nut-cracking disciples.

I supposed Miss D. to have been married long ago. There is a notion current—whether correct I know not—that marriage broadens, softens, and sweetens the feminine mind. By the way, I always thought one of the best of them, so far as natural aptitude was concerned, was C. She had no beauty, but I once saw her act in some private theatricals, and I remember I was much struck with a betrayal, a revelation of emotion.

Your dear letter reached me on Saturday,

about two hours after I had sent forth a despairing plaint. I do not exaggerate when I say that I have read it thirty times.

Letter Fiftieth.

Oh, how sweet it is to commune, dearest, with your lovely soul! Oh, my God, with what profound and what pathetic affection I adore you. You almost make me die sometimes when you imply or seem to—that you think I love you only in one way. Alas, I do love you in that way! Who could help it that once had looked in your lovely eyes and pressed your hand? But you have no idea what an elevating and stimulating influence you have on me. With you my brain grows so prolific that it could give forth work as a fountain plays. But near you I could do nothing. I would deem it sacrilege to waste one of the precious moments that might never occur again. How happy I have been to see you! Happier than ever before in my life. You see, I never knew what love was before; but you have taught me, my adored one. It really is incredible what fertility and vigor

of mind you give me. And nothing could chill my heart but cold words from you. What else could cast so much as the faintest fleck of cloud over my devotion? Oh, I am desperately fond of you. I hunger for the pressure of your hand. I am mad to kneel before you and kiss your little foot. How beautiful you are!

Adieu, my queen, my love, my idol.

Letter Fifty-first.

Every day that passes when I do not see you leaves me more and more depressed. It is only for the first few hours after we part that I can forget to be unhappy. Yesterday I sighed in vain for a letter, and I wanted one because it worried me to think that on Tuesday evening you would get a horrid note that I had posted. I tried to make you promise not to read it, but I could not. You can do anything with me, but I, alas, cannot even persuade you not to open an envelope. I should think I *was* dominated!

How I wished yesterday that I could have been with you in the country, have

passed that perfect day near you. Oh, it would have been a heaven upon earth! Would we not have walked upon the seashore, dearest, and should I not have felt your hand upon my arm, and should not my eyes have fed on your sweet face?

As it was, I sat for several hours by the river.

In one of your most gracious moments you announced to me lately an inclination to think that I was actually becoming respectable. Such flattery quite staggered me. But I really wish you could have seen me at the L.'s, a miracle of deportment and the very ideal of the frump. I wore a carefully composed countenance, in which were judiciously mingled complacency, general philanthropy, special benignity. It is a shame that you do not see me in these my creditable moments.

In answer to your question, I will say that the phrase of which you speak occurs, I think, in the dispatch sent to Mazarin by the Prince de Condé, after the battle of Rocroi. Their victory on that field cost the French dear; but it was worth the cost,

being the first time that Frenchmen had beaten Spaniards in nearly a hundred and fifty years, since Gonzalo of Cordova armed his men with pikes, and drew them up in those deep phalanx-like masses—the famous *tercios*.

There, I should answer your questions more punctually. How can I when there is only one thought in my mind? I love you, worship you, adore you, noblest, dearest, most beautiful of women. Ah, if this were midsummer I should persecute you. As it is June, and you are not free, will you not at least be generous to the most desperately enamored of men?

Letter Fifty-second.

My heart's beloved—oh, you, the woman without whom I cannot live happily one hour, and whom I would not survive a minute—how could you bruise my heart by wasting one precious page on a wretched trifle to which I would never have given a second thought? Never would I have mentioned the thing except that I deemed it possible you might some time see

Mrs. —; and I desire to warn you of her mischief-making propensity. Did you imagine her words could have any influence on me? Ah, sweetest one, how could you believe this so soon, before the roses that you gave me had faded, before the handkerchief that I stole had lost its fragrance—a fragrance that makes me hot and faint by turns with passion? How could you suppose that a man who loves you as you know that I love you could be shaken by a silly word; could be shaken by anything, aye anything that you yourself might tell me. There is nothing you could do that would not be perfect in my eyes, and would not make me adore you more; you could not disenchant me. Ah, but you do not yet know the wondrous alchemy of love; you have yet to learn it. . . . The last time that I wrote how could I speak? Your injunctions had tied my wings and loaded me with weights. Even my thoughts were paralyzed and could not fly to you. But listen, if ever again you accuse me of indifference, I will dispatch a letter that will scorch the mail-bags and set the train

on fire ; and lest it should by some chance reach you, I warn you to take out a large policy of fire insurance on your house.

My darling, let us never speak or think again of such a miserable trifle as the spiteful speeches of envious women. Hereafter, should such things enter my ear, I would forthwith bury them, encyst them in my brain.

. . . When you write to me again say that you care a little for me. Say that I may see you once again. Next week is your birthday. May I send you some flowers ? I worship you, you know it !

Letter Fifty-third.

I have your telegram. My darling, of course Mrs. — said it. But that proves nothing, does it ? She will repeat it when I go up there, for I shall go, with a resolve to stamp out that nest of your enemies. Ah, I shall be very nice to them until they have said all that they have to say—how else shall I know what to answer ?—but when they have ended I shall have my innings. Do you think that my beloved will suffer

then? You have no occasion to feel indignant. I welcome the opportunity of meeting the envious creatures who would drag you to their level. Take in exchange for your charming woman's vanity a dash of my Satanic pride, that cares not an iota what anyone but the loved one thinks. Why, suppose you *had* said the thing, sweet? Do you know it would have flattered me? It was as if you had put your little foot upon my neck. Have I not once kissed your slender footprints in the sand? I almost wish that you had said it. Am I not your slave? Say what you will of me, for you are generous and noble, and I know you would not say a word that was not just.

I am infinitely better and higher for having known you. Tell me that you do not feel that knowing me has deteriorated you. Oh, that is a terrible thought you once hinted at; how cruel to a man who would die for you! You didn't mean it, did you? It would kill me to think you meant it. Tell me that you are not sorry you ever knew me. Tell me! the fault can be rem-

edied. Tell me quickly. Don't miss a mail.

Letter Fifty-fourth.

Oh, when I break out of Capua, and set up my standard on the hills, all the discontented and the clever will rally around me, for they know that I do not fear. What should I fear when I think of thee?

I shall not answer the first letter. It plunged me into sadness. Oh, what irony of fate that sent me, for the first love of my life, the only one that ever filled my heart, into the camp of enemies! It was a rape of the Sabines that this son of Romulus was driven to attempt; and yet I have never heard that those lovely Sabine women hated their Roman ravishers after the fell work was done. Strange, strange beyond revelation are the revulsions of nature! Oh, how I should love you! To doubt it is to dishonor your inevitable fascinations. When you speak thus you dishonour me, I almost hate you—almost—I could not hate you utterly.

Alas ! a sight of her, a word from her would recall me to a sanity.

Letter Fifty-fifth.

I have just returned. I am free at last to write to you where and when I like. I came home with my heart full of tenderness and passion, and I find a dreadful reaction in a letter that fills me with despair. I cannot bear such letters. What do you mean by saying that I struck at you? I struck at fate, which, it seems, has spoiled my life. And you can say that I struck at you! Oh, you are a tigress! . . . You never had these reactions when you were in M—— before you saw me. Now you have them. The inference is too obvious. You say you have wondered what I thought of you that evening in your boudoir. Don't you know what I thought of you then and always? But I give up, I throw up the sponge, I am beaten. What use of struggling longer? For you see I love you, whatever you may think; and if my loving you as a man ought to love a woman makes you unhappy, for God's sake let me

love you in another way ! I can do it. At least, I will try. . . . Before you went away you never wrote me these doubtful, suspicious, insulting letters. Do you wish never to see me again ? Say so if you will be happier. . . . Why don't you know that only one woman in a million can feel love, and only one woman in ten millions can evoke it ? You haven't the faintest conception of what a man would do who feels as I do. You cannot love, the idea is ridiculous. Alas, alas ! I hoped for happiness when I got back, but it was not for me. Adieu *dear* !

Letter Fifty-sixth.

Sweetest one, it is the curse of absence. No one seems to have noticed it, that if you do not correspond, and really love, all is well. A man, at all events, who felt as I feel for you, would never change. A woman might, because she has more vanity. Ah, you are vain, dearest, so vain, and I love you for your vanity. But to be absent and yet correspond, oh, that is ruin. One receives a letter written in one mood.

One answers it—it is received in quite another mood, as the next letter shows. And who suffers? The lover. It is always his fault, no matter what happens. How cruel is your last letter! Why do you say such things to me? Of course you think them or you would not say them. But if I were a woman I would not bruise a man who had traveled day and night to get her letters a few hours earlier, by such self-divulgations as this. But alas! you know your power. You know that you can say anything to me, and you abuse it. Ah, how funny it seems to me to hear you pretend to care for me. Of course you do it only out of sympathy and compassion. It is ill done, madame, an under-study.

Letter Fifty-seventh.

Why do you sometimes say to me—I ask dear, humbly, sadly—for whenever I recall the words they plunge me in sorrow—why do you speak as if you feared, should you ever come to share a little of the feeling which in such awful intensity I have for you, it would cause you to look downward

and not up? If that be truly your apprehension, banish me at once, and utterly. Tell me the reason of the banishment and I will not utter one word of protest or appeal. It would kill me to think that knowing me had lowered you in your own esteem; but I will submit in silence. I love you—a sentiment like mine is a grand orchestra, and sweeps the whole gamut of emotion, from the noblest aspiration to the fiercest appetite. I love you too tenderly, devoutly, and unselfishly to ask for anything which it would hurt your heart to give. But how can it be possible that any feeling you can conceive for me should have an effect opposite to that produced by my love for you? Why, so quickening, lifting, and electrifying is your influence upon my mind and heart as well as body, that I positively dread, I feel ashamed to see anybody lest the source of my moral elevation and mental excitement should be penetrated. I cannot talk with any intelligent person upon any interesting subject without my face so lighting up, and my tongue pouring forth such a flood of

imagery that I know they say, when I am gone, "What has happened to Thornton? Something strange must have befallen him, for he is thrice the man he was." I know they say this, for I sometimes catch them looking at me in a surprised, inquisitive, suspicious way. If your name had been mentioned, one might account for this, but it has not been for weeks. The last time it was, I made it clear that I thought it questionable taste for men who had not the pleasure of knowing a lady to talk of her; so it can't be that. It is the profound, potent, all-pervasive, clarifying, dignifying influence that the thought of you exerts. Oh, why should I exercise on you an influence the dismal and deadly opposite? It is a dreadful, dreadful thought; but do not for an instant fancy that I presume to chide you. You tell me the truth, and it is the truth that is so horrible.

What could be the thing I said to you that you liked? I will try again. Was it what I said when I likened you to Artemis? No? Then was it what I said about violets that were crushed on someone's

bosom? But I have said things since, that it would break my heart to think you did not like better than anything I said before. But who can tell what a woman so distractingly lovable, so mysterious and beautiful, may be thinking or feeling at a given hour? Let us rather stand breathless, trembling, awaiting good or ill, the gods' design. Ah, when you think of me, shiver at the thought that you possess over a human being the power of life and death. The angel of destruction could not fell me to the earth more quickly and more surely, with a touch of his icy finger, than you could with a word.

Letter Fifty-eighth.

Only a woman of genius, who is also conscious of exceeding loveliness, could have invented such a birthday gift as I received on Friday morning. A mere beauty would not have thought of it, because she would have had neither the needed brains nor heart. And there are many women of brains and talent who would not have carried out the thought, indeed, being but too

sadly aware of the fact that there was nothing in a glimpse of their faces and their figures to make to a lover all the difference between heaven and earth. But you knew that if I were sitting at the furthest end of an opera house, where I could descry but faintly your face far distant, the sight of it would cast me into a delicious trance. And your voice—the sound of it would, if I were blind, make me as amorous as poor Milton was when his hot imagination had to play the part of eyes. But my birthday gift meant more to me than the sight of a countenance of matchless loveliness, and the sound of a voice that makes a plaything of my heart. Do you know how proud of you I am when you do a fine, original, bold thing like that? Ah yes, you are as much astray in this century as I am. But no, we are not astray since we have found each other.

Letter Fifty-ninth.

SUNDAY.

What a fool I was ever to imagine that I knew what love was before! I never got a

glimpse of him, never even guessed how terrible, yet how delicious he could be.

Oh, I wish I had not asked you that question yesterday. It broke from me in my torment. You say, "I know not jealousy." My God! no woman could know it as I know it. Her frame would be too weak to bear it. But I do not speak of it—not often—I am too proud to let you see. But that question was blasphemy. After I had sent the letter, I hung over your picture for an hour. That mouth and chin, oh, who could read them as I do, and not loathe himself for the thought that prompted such an insult? Why they are the very home—the altar—of modesty, of purity, of chastity inviolate—alas—inviolable. Ah, there speaks that which may well drive a lover to despair, there speaks Artemis; oh, Heaven, I divined her! All the rest is Venus, but that, Artemis. That was what the old Frenchman saw: his dazzled eyes were not at fault. Oh, I told you that you were fashioned to drive men crazy, while you yourself are sane and cold. You will never love, never, not as women were in-

tended to love men. There will always arise in you the stern, implacable protest of the priestess who defends her temple's sanctity. But what a dreadful fate is mine, to love for the first time, and such a woman! of the mystic dual nature that dooms a man to pine unsatisfied.

Later.—You like me to tell you everything, don't you, dearest? I am ravished when you speak with absolute liberty to me. May I tell you, then, that with all your pretensions to be a woman of the world, in certain things, you seem to me the simplest and most artless child. I so want you to understand me; sometimes you say you do not. But you will, you will if you let me speak to you with complete freedom. By and by, you will have faith in me, will trust me, will believe every word I say. Ah, it is a beautiful thing for two human beings to wholly believe in one another. That is one of Heaven's bridals.

There are things that as my eyes rove over that dim transcript of your loveliness, I would fain say to you but dare not. The brows, the eyelids, the eyelashes, the tell-tale

nuque, that column of ivory, your throat, the splendid proportions and diviner promise of the arm. And oh, God! the budding of a bosom which a deity would renounce heaven to touch; but I dare not, I dare not. The purity of that mouth and chin appall. Stay ever in the clouds, sweet Artemis. Descend to earth not for one hour! What would befall him who knew you once only to lose you?

Letter Sixtieth.

Do you think there is any fun at all in such a sentiment as possesses me, when she that inspires it and controls it with a breath is absent? I am wretched, miserable; I suffer the tortures of the damned.

I cannot answer questions. I cannot write on commonplace subjects. What is to be done for such a hopeless case of *mal d'amour* as this?

I have at this moment received your letter. The first part of it was freezing; you were annoyed with me. But the last part of your note, just a few lines of it, was heavenly. Ah, my loved one, say it

again ; let me have that music ever in my ears ! As a rule you are infinitely more reserved than I, when we are together. I know not what has come over me, for to you I think and feel aloud. I don't understand it ; I never felt before this wild desire to tell everything. I have a wish that there were a window in my heart for you. There is absolutely nothing that I would conceal from you. What bliss it is to me to feel such perfect love and trust as that ! I don't mean of course, dearest, that I am not jealous of you. God forbid. I am mad with jealousy ; but I am too wise to borrow trouble. I don't need to borrow. You say things that throw me into a fever of fear and foreboding. Oh, don't make me jealous ; spare me that. I know myself ; I shall be wicked, cruel. I am capable of hurting the being that I would die for. No, no, I am not ; that sounds like a threat ; and do what you like, alas, I have no rights, not even the rights of a lover, no, not even his.

Dearest, she that wrote the "Hep-tameron" was a charming woman, and like

most women of her time, had probably discovered what love meant. From my soul I pity the man or woman who dies without such learning; yet ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine in a hundred thousand do. They know not love. I see it but too well. Thank God that you have taught me; for with that clew the whole tangled skein of human life is easily unraveled. But about Marguerite; she was the niece of the author of the "Heptameron," she was the sister-in-law of Mary Stuart, the sister of Charles the IX., and Henry the III., and the first wife of Henry the IV. She was not only the loveliest, but the cleverest, the sweetest, and the gentlest woman of that delicious time. Of course, being born in that epoch, she could not lead the life of a nun, could she? Did she not fall in love? It was she who when her first love, la Mole, was done to death, for her sake, caused his heart to be cut out of his body, and treasured it. Do you think that horrible? I think it most beautiful. It was she who, for *la raison d'état*, was married against her will to that

bandy-legged, red-haired little rascal whom fools glorify as Henry of Navarre. She would never let him come near her, except in public, and turned him loose to browse in meaner pastures. But in the Saint Bartholomew—ah, she had a heart like yours, the sweetest and the kindest—she saved the husband that she loved not, how think you? By putting him where the spadassins of her brother and her lover, the Duc de Guise, would never look for him—under her bed. And yet the wretched Gascon lad, when he came to the throne, forgot that he owed his life to this sweet lady, and humbled her and repudiated her, because his vanity was galled at her refusal to have him as a lover. The charges against her are nothing. She was the best woman of her time. Perfect? Had she been perfect she had been less lovable.

What right have you to be such an enchanting, splendid creature, scattering destruction on every hand? Do you want to be the scourge of the human race, or one man's happiness? Have you made up your mind? Tell me, say it. Oh, your

words go through me as if I had clutched an electric wire. But you will never love me a thousandth part as madly as I love you. You could never convince me of that by words. Ah, noble, tender woman, don't you know that I love you as no other woman of this hour is loved, upon this earth? Don't you know it, believe it, feel it, in every fiber of your loveliness? How can you then keep me away so long?

Letter Sixty-first.

I was delighted to hear about G.'s appreciation of your talent. I would rather have his commendation than a unanimous verdict from all the rest. I thank you, dear, for telling me at once these things that make, and ought to make you happy.

How beautiful you are. Do you know that every line of your face, and every tint and every curve of your body are so impressed upon my retina that I can see you at this moment, with wonderful distinctness. If you had no figure at all your face would make you a sorceress, and if your face were always masked, your figure would drive men

crazy. But you are absolutely free from the desires which you arouse in others—the serene and placid condition of the immortal gods. Yes, Aurora, I do not believe that you care much about Tithonus. You are just amusing yourself with him, because you find him, in some particulars, a highly sensitive and nervous subject. You like to make emotional experiments. If the victims don't fully appreciate the æsthetic purposes to which they are put, *tant pis pour eux*. For my own part, I am well content to serve as the provoker of the hard thinking which goes on in that little head. As for mastering the heart that should go with such a pretty head, I have ceased even to aspire to that. If that admirable mansion has a tenant for life, it is not me. You have not even deigned to say that you have not changed your mind about Monday, or to name the hour when one may call and see you. I shall expect to receive a telegram putting me off. Ah well, that sort of thing may be fun to you, but it is death to me.

Alas, I wish I could believe that if I died to-morrow, you would remember me a single

day, that you felt a millionth part of the love, passion, worship, adoration, madness that I feel for you.

Letter Sixty-second.

I have seen you now in four ways, and a large part of my time is spent in trying to make up my mind how I like you best. Of course, in your rich evening gowns, when you reveal most, you are most deadly. But the problem is too complex to be solved on that simple principle. It is not to be denied, at all events, that in that simple girlish costume, in your atelier, you were bewitching. And yet I felt afraid of you. How often have I dreamed of carrying you off, and secreting you from the eyes of men, away upon that enchanted shore of which I have spoken to you. But I know now you would not long be happy thus. You are a woman, thank Heaven, although a princess; and therefore you have some of a woman's captivating weaknesses. It is your sex that makes you different from me in one particular—that you care what people say about you. You think you don't, and yet you do; you can't help it.

You don't care much while what they say isn't true, but the moment that you felt it to be true you would care. Ah, how well I know you ! Of course I do ; it is like knowing myself—with nothing but the sex changed. And so, dear, since, although you do not more than half believe it, it is your welfare and your happiness that I care for more than the slaking of my own mad passion, we will, if you like, exchange in our imaginings the island for the altar. This is a tremendous sacrifice for me to make ; for I foresee that, could I marry you, to a man of my disposition, life in the world with you would be a hell on earth. So long as I do not see things I can, with an effort, put certain thoughts away ; but if I were to see a man look at you in a certain way, I could not keep my hands from his throat.

Oh, I am quite impracticable, I recognize it now. I understand why the Greeks speak of jealousy as green. Green ? yes, I should turn green. It is a silly thing to say, but you were right in guessing that I have not before known what jealousy is ; but Heavens,

I know now! And when I think of the agonies it would inflict upon me, I say, "Oh, never mind what people say; let us take the island and a steam-yacht!" But alas, alas, you could never be contented alone with me. And yet I think you care for me a little. Ah, have I not read it in your eyes, and quivering lips, at last? And that last letter of yours, *is* it not the letter of a woman who loves, loves in all the delicious and enchanting ways which the soul and body can invent? I have drunk of that letter and it has given me joy.

Letter Sixty-third.

What a roguish and provoking creature you are! You see I am still in the sighing stage, sighing like a furnace, and wondering what a certain lovely woman can be made of to say such pretty things and do so little. Oh, Solomon was right; there are three things that I cannot understand, yea, four that are unintelligible unto me. But really the way of a cony among the rocks was straight and obvious compared with the way that this fair lady has of play-

ing with one whom she teases by pretending to call her lover when she knows that he is not. But if I cannot have anything else, tease me more. Give me another letter quickly, give me a "volume." I am much amused at what you tell me about T. Fancy a man's head being turned so easily! How convenient such men must be. If I were a pretty woman, fond of studying the male of my species, but not overburdened with passions myself, that is just the sort of man I would have about me. I wouldn't be bothered with people that are always clamoring for more. I wish I *were* a pretty woman. No, I don't. I fear that with my temperament I should surrender at the first fire, and that would never do, would it? Come, imagine that I am a woman, and give me sage advice. About how long do you think that I ought to hold out *pour l'honneur du drapeau*? A whole day, a week? Oh, that is impossible! You see, we have not all of us your regal self-control. We have got more of the slave's instinct, that when it sees its master drops. You must adapt your counsel to our weakness,

We cannot all play with fire entirely unsinged, as you do.

Ah, would that I might kill you with my love !

HUBERT.

Letter Sixty-fourth.

If I were a woman I should shudder at possessing such power over a human being that one glimpse of my face would make the difference between hell and heaven.

I have ceased to expect or believe in anything. For a whole week I had been looking forward to seeing you. You knew that I was unhappy, and that the only ray of light upon my life was shed by you. Yet, without the faintest provocation, you robbed me of those days ; and, to make my outlook for the future entirely hopeless, informed me that every living woman would have done the same. I take leave to doubt that assertion, but of course your making it means that at any moment you may repeat the torture to which you have subjected me. Oh, I was glad to go away and stay with my dogs, who at all events do not breathe hot

and cold a dozen times a day. My heart was like a lump of lead, when I went to my place. It is certain that only a man free from other causes of unhappiness, and an idle man at that, with nothing to do but fret and dream, has any business to fall in love with a woman of your type—no, not your type—there is no such type, you are unique. I wish I had the strength to break my bonds. I cannot bear such heartless treatment. As I told you at the time, you were thinking only of your own self, and not in the least of the pain you were inflicting on another. What is that but the quintessence of selfishness? You have cared a little for my letters, but for me you have not cared. I exert over you no personal attraction. Do you prefer that I should write to you and never see you? Why don't you say so?

I don't believe that you are coming to town. I shall believe it only when I see you. You will have had time to change your mind a dozen times, and send me twelve contradictory messages. I have lost all faith in any of your promises. I trust

this letter will please you. It is made to your own order, and carefully adapted to the meridian where you dwell.

Letter Sixty-fifth.

Thank you, dear angel, for forgiving the brutal words that you found awaiting you on Tuesday evening. I must have been mad to call you selfish. It is I that am a monster of selfishness toward you. It is strange and dreadful that it should be so, for I don't think that I am particularly selfish where others are concerned. It is only toward my adorable beloved that I am so brutally and fiercely and unmercilessly selfish. At this moment I am almost weeping from contrition and yet I know that to-morrow, if my eyes pounced upon your face, or an hour hence, if my imagination should picture your beauty too vividly, I should be just as bad as ever. What will you do with me, tell me what?

What a child you are! Why don't I invite you to my place? Because you are always there uninvited, you live there. Whose face but yours is it, do you suppose,

that is always wooing my eyes to wander from those that speak to me, and fasten themselves, in a kind of ecstasy, on what the blind people round me believe to be the viewless air? Whose voice but yours enchants my ear, and deafens it to all meaner music? I don't wonder that some people say that I am losing my mind, because I no longer seem to have the faculty of attention. Others, much more penetrating, say, "He behaves as if he were infatuated with someone." Ah, they must indeed be obtuse who cannot penetrate my secret!

Letter Sixty-sixth.

When I began that letter which I wrote yesterday, my heart was full of the most ardent love; but it overflows now with bitterness when I think what the loss of those two days has meant to me. Why, they are gone; no one can give them back to me, not even you. Life is just so much the smaller and poorer for that loss. Oh, it was a cruel blow to deal a man that loved you, and for what cause, think of it! Oh, let me assure you, madame, it is really incon-

venient to have a too ardent lover. I have often read that the over-ardent make fearful mistakes and lose the good-will of the adored one, where cool-headed ones might win. But what good does another's wisdom do us? How can one be wise when one is burnt up with love, desire, and passion? And so—and so there have been moments—I shiver to think of it—when I positively hated you. I hated you as a child hates the hand that hurts him. I could find no excuse for you, as I was whirled by a tempest of indignation and regret.

You know that it is only out of your sight that I grow frantic. At the sight of you I am a lamb. Ah yes, you know it. What am I to do? Don't you see that it is agony to love a woman as I love you. Do you like to see me writhe in agony? How can a woman like it? You say I am all at sea in such things. Thank God, I am; I would rather be at sea than on land so pitiless and rockbound that a lover's sore and desperate rebellion provoked only a superior smile.

Letter Sixty-seven.

I have had three, three happy days : I adore you for giving them to me. I never knew happiness before. To be near you wakes a maddening fever in my veins. I forget where I am ; I lose my own identity.

What delicious ideas and inventions you have ! What a glorified Eden of love is the imagination ! Think of your buying that pretty little cup and saucer, and bringing it to me, by way of our beginning house-keeping on our little island ! I had no idea that I should become so wildly fond of tea ; but a first sip is not enough from that pretty little pink cup. I hope that it will be more than a sip the next time. I want a deep, scorching, intoxicating draught.

Yes, your ways are enchanting. They make me recall the sentence with which Brantome used so often to introduce anecdotes : *Voici une autre gentille et piquante façon d'amour.*

When shall I see you ? You seem very far away to-day, and it is only in my dreams

that I can look into your sweet and bashful eyes.

Do you know that you are one of the proudest women in the world? Ah yes, she that I love is a delicious combination of pride and tenderness. How blessed beyond expression would be the man whom such a one could condescend to love!

I have always said that for genuine passion, the sort of ardor a man feels himself, one must either look among the people, the very humble people, from whom actresses are recruited, or to a great lady. The passions are feeble, if not entirely extinct, among the *bourgeoisie*, or even among what one would have to admit were ladies, but not great ladies. They are such slaves of convention that their passions, if they were born with any, are starved to death. But a great lady can be above conventions.

Oh, that I might be in the country with you to-day! to wander with you in the woods, or on the sands, where I could turn my head over my shoulder and mark your foot-prints, and stooping kiss them. But you will never love me as I love you, never.

As to the degree of your sentiment for me, I am rent with doubt and anxiety. I shall give you back the ribbon. You must wear it for me a little while, for it has lost a little of its maddening perfume.

Good-night !

Letter Sixty-eighth.

. . . I must write to you again to-night. Oh, you lovely creature, I have seen your picture ; I cannot tell you what I think of it. I will not until you answer this one question. Ah, answer it, my queen, my empress. Tell me exactly when you began to paint it, and when you ended it. Ah, tell me that ; it will mean much to me, and tell me the truth, as I tell you. Oh, yes, you and I alone, of all mortals, always tell the truth to one another. Ah, how great, how great you seem to me ! It is simply not possible that you should care for me. Oh, you are the heaven-sent genius ! You cannot, cannot care for me. My God ! My God ! how I do worship you ! All my life I have been dreaming of a woman to whom I could talk in shorthand. Men used to tell me that if a

woman were as well educated, as accomplished, as talented as I desired, there would be something wanting in her heart or her body. I laughed them to scorn. "You think that brains would make a woman less desirable? You have read history in vain. I have not, no, I have not. There have been such women, and it must be that one exists—shall I find her?"

And now you are ill. You are overworked. You cannot eat. When you receive this letter, get up at once! I order you to do so. Do you hear me? He that you thought a slave has suddenly become a sovereign. Get up, do you hear me? and eat a beef-steak. I will kill myself if you cannot receive me before I leave.

Oh, my love, my love, my love, send me a line to-night!

Letter Sixty-ninth.

Do you know, madame, that you have had the honor of making me cry? I don't mean crying for you, that wouldn't be so strange would it? But crying over the child of your hands, over that little tragedy

in your painting. Ah, you don't know what a triumph was that, and what a consummate proof of power. If you could so sway me, how will you sway others? Less — what shall I say — less on their guard, less tough, less rock-like? Yes, there is more genius in this little thing than in any of its predecessors. How could you write to me then, as you did, that you were discouraged? That you "could not paint"? Well, I gave you a good scolding then for your self-depreciation, and if you ever dare to say that to me again, I will—let me see—I will whip you with little rods made of young sugar canes!

Oh, but I am proud of you! How heavenly sweet you are to say that I may give you a little present. Tell me what was in your mind. Can it possibly be the same thing that I have thought of, and wondered whether you would be pleased or annoyed that I should send you?

You can judge how easy it is for me to go away from you, when I tell you that last week there was a desperate effort made to take me away for three weeks. Everything was to be done; I should have noth-

ing to do, and a prospect of lots of money. Do you know, I actually had to pretend to accept, but I speedily invented an iron-clad excuse, and telegraphed it.

Had I painted this picture that you have done, I would have dozens of copies strewn all over my rooms. How dreadful that you are ill.

Now if you don't obey me and rise from your couch, and eat something immediately and stand firm on those pretty legs, what shall I do to you? Alas, I forget *La reine d'Espagne n'a pas de jambes*.

Letter Seventieth.

In the name of God, do not protract this fearful agony a moment. Say something to me—put me out of this terrible pain. If you mean never to see me or write to me again, oh, say so. Let me know the worst quickly, quickly. It is fiendish to leave me for four days in suspense.

I was mad on Wednesday; I know not a word I said. Whatever I said I abjure it with my head in the dust. But as there is nothing, nothing but love and adoration for

you in my heart, I could have said little that should wound you very deeply. It is the very test of love that even in his rage he does not.

In the fiercest heat of my disappointment and my anger you must have seen that you possessed my heart, that its every beat and throb are yours. I admit that I was wholly wrong, that I had no cause for wrath, that everything you did was right, that there is nothing you could do which could justify such an outburst. Alas! I admit everything, for what am I but a poor miserable slave. One does not trample as you do on a slave. One is more merciful when one is all-powerful. But I want your sympathy and your forgiveness, not your pity. I will not have your pity, there is no room for it in the same heart with love. Akin to love she may be, but she is love's poor relative, allowed to frequent the ante-room, but not the presence chamber, where the princess is enthroned. No, I'll have none of her. But forgive me, forgive me, once more forgive; and for God's sake send me a word at once, one word.

Letter Seventy-first.

My heart is too much wrung to command service of my voice. I cannot speak, I can only throw myself upon your mercy, and I can only weep in an agony of contrition and self-contempt.

Listen, dearest—ah, let me call you dearest just this once—I must tell you something now that may seem to criminate my conduct, to make it worse. I do not want to have to tell you this when I am allowed to see you. As it turned out, there was no cause for the cyclone of fury and anger which burst upon me when I saw, as I thought, all my hopes shattered in an hour. I can no longer claim the honor of unselfishness. It was of myself that I was thinking when I poured out upon you those angry and cruel words. But no, I cannot write it. I will tell you, if you deign to see me, how I discovered that on that terrible Wednesday, the stars, after all, had been fighting in their courses for me. Nothing was as I supposed. Don't say that this makes me still more unpardonable. How

could anyone foresee such an interposition of destiny on my behalf? Until I met you, fate was always against me. How could I realize that you had changed the dice?

You have not received the cry of despair that I sent to you yesterday afternoon, when I found from your silence that another night of horror lay before me. Ah, when did I refuse to answer a word of yours? When I sent you letter after letter and telegram after telegram, and I found you meant to leave them all unanswered, hell could have held no surprises for me. But why should I speak of these sufferings, since I deserved them, and since you will at least permit me to see you once more, and tell you on my knees how repentant and ashamed I am of my mad conduct, on that horrible day? Oh, perhaps, if it were another man's cause, I might, even on this paper, plead it in such a way as a little to allay the just and intense resentment that you feel. All I will say now is that you must remember that it was only the fear of being kept away from you that maddened me to speak those cruel words; and that I

was already dazed and half beside myself by something unkind you had said on meeting me.

Yet how strange it seems to me ; these tortures which would have made me hate another woman, have only made me adore you more.

Letter Seventy-second.

I waited until six o'clock, and then came home in despair. Home? It has been like a grave to me. This morning I was nearly dead -your silence had almost killed me. Do you think it hurt me less because I knew I had deserved it? Ah, yes, God knows that I deserved it for saying, under any circumstances, and no matter what I thought, a single harsh word to a woman so sweet, so sweet as you. Have you imagined for an instant that I did not appreciate your infinite sweetness and your goodness? Yes, it was your very goodness, your heartfelt wish to be good and to make me good that provoked my resentment. Was there ever anything so horribly wicked? I wanted to be bad, and I grew

fearfully angry, because I saw that you did not feel as I did; or rather because I saw that you were so incomparably better a woman than I was a man. I thought and said, in my frantic folly, that I could better bear never to see you than to see you only as a friend. But I lied. I must see you. I could not live without it. If I wanted proof, these last few days have given it. Ah yes, they have taught me that whatever you wish I must submit to; that anything, anything, everything is bearable but to lose the sight of your face and the sound of your voice. Ever since Thursday, when I woke up with a start to a sense of what I had done—the iniquity of it—before I got your sentence of banishment, I have scarcely slept at all. For two days I had not eaten. In the wildest agitation, on Thursday evening, I wrote you a few lines of incoherent appeal; and I sent you a little message on Saturday. And I hoped, hoped with a fainting hope, that I might get one word from you on Monday. But I did not. And then Tuesday also passed—still silence—oh, I have been punished enough.

Don't punish me any more ; I cannot support it, I am worn out with suffering. Heavens! how incredible it is that one human being should be able, just by silence, to give such awful pain to another.

When I telegraphed, this morning, I did not mean to write. I wanted to speak by word of mouth. I am so trammelled when I write. But I could not wait. I must ask you . . . don't you care for me any more? Will you never care for me any more? I do not ask you to forgive me, but I implore you to spare me, and to still, still like me a little. I love you a thousand times more than ever. The more I suffer the more ardently I love. But don't, on that account, make me suffer any more just now. Give me a little respite. Why, formerly I used to think myself unhappy ; but what was that to the unheard-of misery that I have gone through in the last few days? I simply could not have supported it longer. The limit of endurance would have been passed to-day.

Heavens, dearest—let me call you so once more—is it possible that I am going to

see you again and to-morrow? I can't believe it. I shall not believe it until my hungry eyes pounce upon your lovely face. Oh, will that face be cold, or far worse, sad? Then what will become of me? I shall be speechless, but at least I can look at you. You know not what joy that will be to me.

I love you, I never loved you so desperately as I do at this hour. I am insane with the desire to see you. Would to God that to-morrow afternoon were here!

Letter Seventy-third.

It is just half an hour, my love, my love, since I found your sweet, forgiving letter. I would to God at this moment I could bedew your pretty feet with tears. Alas, I had thought for a moment that you were in the wrong, but it is always I. Oh, darling, with the infinite kindness which you have always shown to me, listen to me for a moment, while I show how I could so fearfully misunderstand. Ten minutes before I reached your house I had obtained and read a heavenly letter which was still warm on my heart, when I met you at your door, and

you informed me not only that you could not see me at your house that day, but that you never would unless I came simply as a friend. It simply meant dismissal. I was dazed, bewildered, and you will remember that through our walk you said nothing in explanation, until we reached the riverside, after which something else occurred. Do you think it was wholly strange that it seemed to me, if I was to be sent away, that it might have been done by letter, and without exposing everything to news caterers—to the public? But about that I should have cared literally nothing, if I had not supposed that I had lost you. Ah, dear, my heart, I trust, is large enough for pity toward those who have few friends. But you are the only woman, sweet one, that I have ever loved upon this earth. You have taught me what love really is, a terrible, delirious, delicious thing.

Letter Seventy-fourth.

I wish—so inconsequent is man when he is agitated—that you might have glanced at my letter before seeing me. Perhaps,

then, you would have been to me less cold and implacable than I fear you will be now, I am afraid to see you. I am certain that I shall shiver when I mount your stairs. Ah, I know well you can be, when you choose, what Milton calls "terrible to approach." But I shall come. I would not miss the chance of seeing you if I knew that I had to die. Say what you will to me, treat me as you please. At least I shall have looked at you and listened to your voice once more. What an idiot I was to say that I could not bear a Platonic attachment; that to this I preferred nothing. Why it was a lie; a few hours would have proved it to me. Anything is a whole world better than nothing. If I were never to see or hear from you again, I could not and would not live an hour. No consideration of compassion for others could restrain me, for I should not be master of myself. I could not bear the awful gloom and loneliness that would encompass me. But there—I will not ask you to forgive me; you do not like it, and I would not have you do it if you would. It is not your forgiveness that I want, it is

your love. Yes, love, in spite of my wickedness to you. I know that what I said *was* wicked. I hate myself for saying it, but I loved you all the time, and, oh, you knew it. You knew that by your silence you consigned me to the most frightful torture. You did well, dear one, to be angry, but don't be angry any more. Be once more sweet to me. Don't you think you can? Oh, at all events, let me love *you*.

Letter Seventy-fifth.

I have your letter. Then you had cared for me a little; I really was convinced you did not. I was frozen. I had put this and that together. I was sure you had cast me off forever. I couldn't bear it. My God, what have I suffered! Why, I love you to distraction. I must see you. I am going to take this to your door. If you are not at home I can leave it. Let me see you again; I cannot live without you, I love you.

These last days I have seen only your enemies. How I hate them. I hate everyone who stands between me and you.

Oh, don't poison me again with your coldness. Don't make me jealous.

Oh, I am so changed ! I have been ill ; you will not know me.

Dear, give me a word.

Letter Seventy-sixth.

Ah dearest, my own darling, my precious one, I am like a man that was dead and am alive again. When I left your door, I did not walk, I clove the air. The wings that I lost had sprouted from my shoulder ; I looked about me with delight and ravishment. The streets, I dare say, were black with mud, but to me they seemed paved with ivory and pearl. The men and women that I met were doubtless sordid and shabby, but to me they seemed to have angel's faces, and they stared at me as if I were a man in a trance. One thought was always singing in my breast. . . . Heavens ! what a blissful, what a heavenly reaction ! Since I got up to face another day, with conviction that I should never see her again, that I had lost her, lost her through my own mad folly.

And now, darling, I must confess it, though it is a feeling which a man with any pride despises, that it is a wild jealousy which greatly increases the tortures of separation from you. I am always on the look-out for material to feed that detestable passion. You are so inexpressibly sweet, I know, that I ought wholly to trust you; but I can't. When I am with you I believe; but alas, when I am away from you doubt returns. . . . How can you say that I don't like you to tell me the smallest details of your life? I love it, except when you tell me of the many men who surround you. You didn't mean me to like that, did you? But everything else you tell me delights me. Why, dearest, when you are in good spirits you do not so much talk as sing. It is like the carol of a lark. Carol to me to-morrow, darling; ah yes, write to-morrow, sweet one, that I may get it on Monday, and possess my soul in patience. What a love you are! There never was such an enchanting creature. Even your anger sets my brain on fire.

I have just read your last letter for the

twentieth time ; and I cannot control my agitation. I have had to pace my floor. I have been thinking of your beauty, that beauty from which a lover might drink the very wine of life. Never was there so superb a beauty, so regal, so imperial. I am sick of looking at pictures and statues since I have seen your matchless loveliness ; and such vitality, such magnetism, such a flame of love shoots from every fiber of your entrancing body.

I can write no more. Good-night !

Letter Seventy-seventh.

Your dear telegram, sent to me by —, comforted me a little ; but I have been in the depths since I parted with you, and I know not what will become of me. Yes, there is something of the tigress in you. You have the cruelty of that animal. You like, I think, to look at suffering. I am not going to speak of your rebukes, which wasted nearly half of four precious, irrevocable hours, except to say this : you say that you would not reprove me if you did not care for me. That is true. It is a proof of

love, but a sad one. Are there not others more becoming a sweet and noble woman like yourself? might you not as well say that the destructive lightning is, after all, an outcome of the same mysterious force which has other products beneficent and beautiful, which draws man to woman, and which is so strangely potent in your own lovely body, dear one? And does it never occur to you that if your reproofs have the power to wound me so deeply and so long it is because I love you so much? Have you not observed how indifferent I am to the opinions of others, to their praise or their blame? Ah, is it not almost cowardly to twist around a knife in a breast which is invulnerable except where it beats for you? Then, dearest, I have a hot, fierce temper myself; and I shudder lest some day I should be provoked, by what seems to me injustice, to speak again bitter words, I know not what, which I should all my life long be sorry for. But there—let me say no more.

Do wear the roses in your bosom, for my sake, which I send.

Letter Seventy-eighth.

Your heart told you that my heart would ache, and so you sent me that pretty box. The flowers have had more kissing than any flowers, even yours, deserve, except that loveliest of scarlet blossoms, your beautiful mouth. But you are not mine, you are not mine, and you never will be!

It was an enchanting little letter that came with the roses, and yet I sighed when I had read it. Not, dearest, that I was not comforted to think that you suffered a little, or that you suffered as well as I. That was a comfort. One yearns for sympathy in pain. What made me sigh was the unconscious revelation in the note, of the limitations of your feeling for me. Alas, I am a great philosopher in love, doctor in amore. I would I were not. In such things it is indeed folly to be wise. But how much happier I should be if I could deceive myself! But I see so clearly, I see that you are so sympathetic, so gentle, so generous, so womanly, that when you find a man is really in love with

you, you give him a soothing species of responsive tenderness that would beguile any man, and may even for a little while deceive yourself. But I recognize also that you are the last woman in the world to control yourself, if Aphrodite had truly marked you for her own. Heavens, no! one might as well attempt to chain a whirlwind. I remember saying something like this to myself the first time I ever saw you: "This entrancing creature," I thought to myself, "would, I have no doubt, speak most sagely about duty; ay, and make every word good in act. She knows, however, that she blasphemes a little when she talks of love, that she takes in vain the name of a great and terrible god, who knows of no compromises, no divided allegiance, no escape, no rescue. This woman will be in love with love, rather than with her lover. The conflict between love and duty—ah me! the wise ones know that such a conflict is unthinkable. You remember the mediæval legend—Tennyson treats it, I think, in one of his idyls—about a pretty boy, who masquer-

ades in the arms of the knight invincible, and essays to keep a certain pass. At the mere sight of that terrible armor, many a good warrior gives way, and yet, as it turned out, anyone who would but sit his horse firmly, and poise his lance steadily, and confront the masquerader, would have overcome him at a stroke. But you see it was not love, the knight invincible, that was worsted in that fight, but only one of his many winsome and elusive counterfeits.

To a woman that loves there is no tragedy like that of love unsatisfied; no spectacle so piteous as the prayerful eyes and wistful lips of an unrequited lover; no emotion so profound, so mighty, so irresistible as the stirrings and upheavings of a self-immolating passion. I will talk no more of that. I have spoken once to show you that I *know*, and so that you hereafter, looking back, may say, "He knew me better than I knew myself. I deceived myself, but he was not deceived." I will speak no more on this subject, for I am well aware that not by argument can love be evoked where it exists not. If a woman

loves not, whose fault is it? surely not hers, the man's. Men ought to remember this then; they would be able to retain at least their self-respect.

Au revoir, sweet lady, you have promised to see me. Do you repent already of the promise? You need not. I am going to succumb to the situation. We will speak only of art to-day.

Letter Seventy-ninth.

You have no more conception of the depth and height and fervor of my love for you than a child fifteen years old would have. If you had, it would be utterly impossible for you to misconstrue me as you do sometimes. There is nothing you could do—except one thing—that I would not think beautiful because you did it. But you are eternally accusing me of things that I am not guilty of. Do you think me capable of deliberately lowering myself in your esteem? Do you suppose that, if there had been what you imagined, I could have mentioned that person's name to you? That I would not have

avoided it as I would the plague? Sometimes I am sad unto death. It is a madness to me to think of all the years that I have missed. Do you think I have no cause to weep for them, those years, lost, lost, irrevocable? O Heavens! what a knell is that word! For if I had known you then my life would not have been shadowed with the awful tragedy which darkened it so long, a tragedy I have never spoken of to a human being, which I cannot speak of now. Had I known you all would have been different.


Do you know why I chose those particular roses yesterday? Do you not know that the tender, soft, pale pink of their inner petals recalled to me the blush on your fair cheek; and the satin skin of my queen's foot as it gleams through the stocking's mesh of lace?

I dreamed last night we were upon our island. Oh, how much nicer you are upon our island and in my dreams than you were when I last saw you, than you will be to-day! There, you seemed to want me, dearest, near you, almost as much as I

want you. You have no wish to torture me. On Wednesday you were of ice. Oh, what fibs you tell! It is your only fault. You don't keep your promises, madame! You take advantage of the fact that your creditor is altogether too nice to dun you. You keep a man for weeks in a state of intolerable agitation, and then push him away with your soft palm. But alas! although I am bold as a lion on that island, I am dreadfully afraid of you when I see you.

Letter Eightieth.

How dare people get married, and how without shame can they live together in certain close relations, when the only feelings they know are but the pale ghosts of mine? Did you ever see a man look at a woman as I look at you? Why my eyes are insatiable. They never let you escape. Yes, just to look at you can almost quiet me. Oh, no, quiet is not the word, control, not quiet; and let me tell you, I have gazed at you so long and tenderly that I foresee the time will come when



we shall know what we are thinking without the help of speech. That will be inconvenient for you, dear, will it not? I, however, shall not mind it in the least. I have not a thought which I would not be glad that my beloved should see, for I haven't one that does not point to her.

Letter Eighty-first.

I know what you are doing is going to be a fine and noble piece of work. If you are depressed about it, that means nothing except that you are a woman of superior talent, no, of genius, and therefore cannot help fastening your eyes upon minor shortcomings more than upon noble achievements. You see you are aiming at a star, and if you happen to miss, you will not condescend to notice that your arrow has far outflown all others that have been shot this year or last. It is just like you to want to return good for evil, to say something kind about that person who attacked you.

What you said about wanting to dance with me touched me so much. How well I understood what was in your mind. It is

in my mind also. Ah, how I long to claim you in the sight of God and man! How proud I should be of you! You know that I love you as you deserve to be loved, and you know also that I deserve to be loved even by such a glorious, magnificent daughter of passion as yourself. I live only in the present and the future. I never lived before. My past is dead, sealed with seven seals. Ah, do not you unseal it! Remember only that I love for the first time, that I love to distraction.

I must thank you, loveliest and dearest, for the sweet letter I got yesterday, the first since I pressed your perfect hand at parting, and watched my goddess pace away. How well I understand every phase and current of your exquisite yet ardent nature! I thank God that I am qualified to understand a being at once so delicate, so noble, and so impassioned. Yes, I know why you seem to shiver at one moment, and to shrink half fearful from him that adores you; and in the next moment yield your spirit in the abandonment of love and faith. All this time I can think only of two things—how

you looked when I last saw you, and how you will look when I see you next.

A bientôt, âme de ma vie !

Letter Eighty-second.

Oh, would to God, my darling, that we were living together in some enchanted island, where it might be my blessed privilege to be your servant, to do everything for you, you lovely little dear ! It is agony to me to know that anyone else has the right to do the smallest thing for you. Let me thrust that thought away ! Why do I so often use diminutives to you, such a tall and stately creature ? Ah, Héloïse—Hélo you say is the pet name, what a sweet name—those little words fall instinctively from the pen of love, when it is a man who holds it. Yes, it is the deep-planted virile instinct that forces him—if only to soothe his wounded heart—to think of the beloved one as utterly dependent on him, as wholly, entirely his own. My pride is tortured by our present situation, and what balm it would be if I could claim you in the sight of man and

Heaven. And yet that is the weakest of the reasons why I should not be satisfied with being the lover of a princess, but should long to be her husband. Heavens, what it would mean to me to be absolutely certain that I should see you every day, that every night you might be near me! How could we ever know satiety? It is only common souls that know it. Did Antony and Cleopatra know it? Oh, what ecstasy it would be to work for thee! You asked me once how you had changed me. Why the change goes to the very root of things. Before I saw you I considered my life a failure, *manquée*, and I was dying of atrophy of heart, of the collapse of hope. But since I have the rapture of knowing you, how can I think my life a failure? A glorious triumph, rather, a towering elevation. Ah, you have given me such energy, such quickened instinct, such vibrating sympathies, such an intense interest in human life. What do I not owe you? pleasure only? the divinest that ever mortal tasted? Oh, no; that is only a fraction of my debt.

I boil with indignation when I hear of

the silly, waspish, and brutal attacks upon your work. Listen to me ; I shall speak soberly and disinterestedly. I know as much as most of those who venture to name you. I insist that this single picture, the first that I ever saw, would have given the artist a great reputation. There is in all you do skill, insight, sympathy, imagination, pathos, and infectious life breathes on your canvas. You would never be attacked were you a poor, unknown, unenvied person ; but you are a great lady, beautiful, admired, *puissante*, and it cuts to the quick a lot of less successful aspirants for fame, who have borne the burden and heat of the day, to see you at the eleventh hour, by virtue of the added splendor of your talent, stretch forth a shapely, languid hand, and calmly pluck the guerdon for which they have perspired in vain. Ah, pity the poor things, my own ; they but disclose their own sufferings. They cannot harm you. . . . All the really competent, penetrating critics who have intellect enough to be candid, and who can afford the luxury of self-respect, have said

as much and more and better. You know that to be so. Then do not let these ants have the satisfaction of stinging a being whose mind and heart they are too groveling to understand.

Dearest, don't be angry with me for having sent you such a scorching letter yesterday. I should not send such missiles ; I swear that I will do so no more. But I had been parted from you so long, and the mere glimpse that I had of you heaped fuel on the flame. Ah, what torment in Dante's catalogue was comparable to what I suffer, to know you so near and not to see you, not to be able to fall at your feet. Yet I hope that you read that letter ; although I know full well it exists no more.

Letter Eighty-third.

I have your letter, the second. Ah, dearest, how beautifully you write to me. I have reproached myself far otherwise. There are certain moods in which I am whirled like a leaf in a storm. I have sworn to myself that in such moods I will run from a pen instead of seizing it. They are not my

only moods, ah, no; nor are they dominant. I give you my word of honor that if you deliberately say to me—by letter, not by word of mouth, for I should need time to collect myself—that to make me happy would make you unhappy, there is such boundless love and worship in my soul for my darling, that I could be to you what Dante was to Beatrice, or Petrarch to Laura. Oh, yes, I could—I feel it—I could live upon your letters—and never, to my latest breath, would a thought stray from her that I adored. This is true; it is heaven's truth. I love you, dear, as a saint might wish to be loved, and if I love you in other ways, and sometimes speak of them, it is because I see you so little, and get just enough to make me frantic. Do I not, thou darling of my soul? Oh, my God! I cannot help it, it is not my fault but fate's, that since I have seen you and touched your hand I have desired you fiercely.

But if you misjudge me I will kill myself. This is no idle threat; it is the cold statement of a fact.

Letter Eighty-fourth.

Ah, sweet one, never have I loved you more devotedly than at this moment. Your two beautiful letters of Saturday and Sunday, enclosed in one envelope, have just come into my yearning hand. Never, I think, since writing was invented, did woman write to man words at once so tender and so intoxicating. Dear, I can never have enough of them. I love you so madly, am so utterly, completely thine, that I cannot be told too frequently that you care for me a little. You have not, have you, any conception of what rapture you give me with a tender word? I love you more and more, daily and hourly; though I thought months ago that my heart was swelled to bursting. But there is no end to the devotion that you evoke. You speak to me in every beautiful sight, in each delightful tone and odor, in each enchanting or elevating thought. You inform the atmosphere with hope and love. Would to God that at this very instant your little bronzed shoe were on my neck. But what does my dar-

ling mean about pitfalls? Do you apprehend danger from any source? Enlighten me. I do not wonder you are distrustful.

So you didn't like Mrs. C.'s black eyes; no more did I. To think that you should fancy that the man you stooped to could admire eyes of any tint but yours! But the poor thing who led such a dreadful life with C. had, I believe, beauty as well as remarkable intellect, and arch, roguish, bewitching ways. And in these respects she was a little like my darling. Didn't you like me to think that? I couldn't help thinking it. Whenever I read of anyone attractive I say to myself: yes, she reminds me a little of her, as the moon reminds one of the sun.

Dearest, I have pressed my lips long and passionately to a little place in your letter, pressed them till my head spun round. Would that at this moment I could put my lips as ardently to your lovely hand. Good-night.

Letter Eighty-fifth.

I really cannot see why I might not have a cup of tea with you to-morrow. I do not think that your explanations explain. You simply don't want me to come ; that is all. I don't believe you ever mean me to come again. This is a thought that suddenly has come to me. If it ripen to a conviction I shall go away. I shall go at once, and put three hundred miles between us. Fool that I am, I should come back the next day, to learn whether you had cared much. But seriously, I think that precious opportunities, never perhaps to be regained, are being lost. I call them opportunities ; perhaps you call them pitfalls to be assiduously shunned. . . . You were very handsome to-day. I do not know that I ever saw your eyes and lips more beautiful. And what bewitching little shoes ! They did entire justice to your exquisite foot. I envy the shoe-maker that made them. His must have been a labor of love. I have told you before, have I not, how much I like your hand ? How white and smooth

and strong it is ! And it is with this hand that you write to me ! Think of me at least sometimes, and comfort me by saying that you do. For hours after I get a letter from you, if it is a kind one, I am in bliss.

When I come in what balm to senses and to heart to find upon my desk-one of your dear messages turning up its sweet face to be kissed ; scenting the air with its faint, fine, familiar fragrance. Still carol to me ; my ear thirsts for thy melody. In my heart is your nest builded.

Would I have you stoop to the make-shifts of other women ? If I said yes, my angel, I should be the basest man on earth. A man permitted by some relenting mood of Heaven to find a blossom of Eden in his path, only to tread it in the mire. Ah ! that, indeed, would be turning from heaven, hellward. I know, then, the love which you awaken in me is the most blessed influence my life has ever known. It would be appalling to think it were otherwise with you.

Say that, for you also, our intercourse has not been wholly wanting in stimulus, in

sympathy, n awaking to the fullness and beauty and ecstasy of living.

Letter Eighty-sixth.

THURSDAY EVENING.

It is such a joy, such a stimulus to talk to you; and you are so generous, in all you say of others. This is real majesty. Do you think I do not appreciate it? I could not now insult you by the shadow of a suspicion. Ah, don't imagine that trust on my part has anything in common with the marital sense of security, which in all ages has provoked derision, and which is apt to create carelessness about the treasure it has obtained. I cannot even imagine remissness in a real lover. He would deserve to lose his idol. I would never lose mine from such a cause as that.

I should like to kiss your pretty hands this minute, to let my famished eyes rest upon your loveliness. Ah, I wish that I might eat and drink of thee.

Letter Eighty-seventh.

I worried afterward over the thought that you might not like my sending you those papers all tumbled and badly out of shape. A man can never feel certain that some rough, careless act of his may not have jarred upon the delicate nerves and senses of a woman. Ah, you send things neatly folded and tied with white silk!

How fortunate that you are a *femme artiste*, as well as a great lady, that in your art you may speak to the world. Why, you can be a blessing to mankind?

Perhaps the blessing would have been more unmixed had the genius, in your case, been allied with less beauty. I have not quite made up my mind whether for me in particular it was fortunate. Since I have known you I have had so much torment and so little rapture. Last night I could not help breaking into wild, harsh laughter at your injunction to sleep well. Ah, before I knew you, I could do that, but you, fair lady, have murdered sleep.

Later—When I said I could do better

than Ruy Blas, I meant, of course, the man described, not Hugo, the describer. There are two weak points in the conception of Ruy Blas, and it is strange that Hugo did not see them. The lack of personal dignity, and the exhibition of physical courage is a little too tardy. As to the dignity, I do not refer to the man's putting on a lackey's coat, and afterward consenting to personate Don César de Bazan. Both acts were dignified, ennobled by their motive. They were done that he might be brought near the woman that he loved. But having become an equerry, he should have stopped there. By becoming prime minister, he would see less of her rather than more. Besides, it was known to him, and notorious to everyone, that his sudden rise was due to the queen. He should have accepted from her nothing smaller than herself. Then what began like an idyl would not have been converted into what looked like a profitable speculation. As for the marquis, his life should not have been spared until Donna Maria was almost irreparably compromised. He should have been choked to

death in that earlier scene where he bids Ruy Blas, now prime minister, shut a window. But what, you may ask, would have become of the play? I don't know and I don't care. The play might have been spoiled, but Ruy Blas would have been nicer. Plays were made for men, not men for plays. And that reminds me as to the "art for art" canon. I tried hard to get at that in an essay upon art, which I wrote at college, when you, sweet one, were still casting furtive glances at your dolls. I remember saying that it was a very good formula for the artist, "art for art"; and that the lawyers had devised a like one, "law for law." But after all, man made art a law for himself. He had not the slightest notion of fashioning idols of wood and stone, and so I suggested that perhaps the largest, safest, and soundest formula was "art for man."

I had hoped to get a little line this morning, with an answer to the question that I whispered; but there is none. You are angry, are you? Oh, say you are not. You could not be long angry with me, could you?

Do you remember telling me once you wished me to do something great, something for humanity? That touched me deeply; but your hand fell upon an open wound, although it fell like a snowflake. Sometime I will tell you of a hope I once had. But now it is dead.

Letter Eighty-eighth.

I am absolutely certain that not a soul looked at the bride to-day. How could they when your loveliness was *en vue*! Doesn't everybody notice that you are *en beauté*? I want you to tell me what is said to you, particularly by the shrewd and observant women.

Just think of it; I have not had a line from you, and this is my fourth letter. You don't appreciate me at all. You don't seem to realize that nobody else can get one letter out of me. Well, I am justly punished for my discourtesy to others. Now I know what it means and how it feels to write four letters to another's one. I am becoming compassionate.

If you had not given me that fragrant

little bit of ribbon, I don't know what I should have done. How lucky it is for me that you are wise as well as beautiful!

I have been thinking since I saw you last, of the impression you made upon me when I saw you at your house, in January. Of course you were a splendid, stately creature, in the very prime of your beauty, but you were cold and indifferent. How indeed could you be otherwise? I said to myself: would she have been different if she had let me see her earlier? . . . And then I asked myself: I wonder if this gorgeous woman has ever loved, really loved? She could love; that is evident in every line of her figure, in her lips and in her eyes; but has she? And then I cursed myself, for I felt that I should never please you. I was but too painfully conscious that I did not please you then. Never in my life did I feel such self-contempt and hopelessness as when I came down your stair. But once ensconced safely in my cab, a strange reaction came. All at once the thought swept over me that, after all, I was a man

and you were a woman ; and that to lose the first heat did not necessarily mean the loss of the race. And then my pride and my virility came back to me, and I swore, swore the oath that I would tame that superb creature, and make her care for me. It was as if some spirit had breathed in my ear what Don Salluste whispers to Ruy Blas, at the end of the first act of the drama.

I measured the difficulties to be surmounted ; I saw plainly that your first impressions would be against me. But I remembered also what the Duchess of Devonshire said of John Wilkes—that the handsomest man in London had but five minutes' start of him. Yes, I had got off very badly ; but in a long race, wind and limb might tell. Ah, this was a feature of the romance that you know not, though I always meant to tell you.

Letter Eighty-ninth.

. . . I roamed about the sidewalks overlooking D's. for hours, like the peri shut out from the gates of paradise, wishful of

one last glimpse. Do you remember Thackeray's

Outside the porch sometimes I linger?

Alas, there was no glimpse for me, and I chided myself for doing what perhaps would have displeased you. Are you displeased?

Heavens! how I want to see you to-morrow, in the white gown and hat! You will be a tearing belle, but that you always are. I should like to see the expression in your eyes during the marriage service. I wish that at a certain moment my eyes could encounter yours. There would be tears in mine. But there, let me not sigh for the moon. You will, at all events, some time let me see you in your bravery; yes, I count on that. Dearest, don't flirt! But if you really cannot help it, *entourée* as you will be, be general, I beg of you, in your distribution of sweet looks and fetching ways. I know you will dance, and I hate the men who will be privileged to touch your hand. What right have they to touch it? It is not theirs, it is not theirs.

4

Letter Ninetieth.

. . . It is incredible how much I care for your respect. Would to God that I were more worthy of your ennobling influence. Yes, dearest, it is not your fault you cannot do for me what the goddesses did for their mortal lovers—make me a demigod.

I glanced, on Sunday, at what S. writes about naturalism in art. His notions seem correct enough, but they flash in the pan. Nobody will read him. He is dull; he infects nobody. He does not evince the gift of startling the mind, firing curiosity and riveting attention. Oh, to-day, besides the lost letter, there was another lovely missive from thee. You know how to bless as well as rule; it is the prerogative of goddesses. How ashamed I felt at my vexation of last Friday, when I imagined myself to be ill-used. Yes, you say truly that there was a time when I would gladly have written ten letters for a word from you; whereas now I hold myself cheated if I don't get one for one.

Does that prove that I love you less or more? I think the difference is simply an indelible mark of a difference in the stage of love. It is certain that for a single indulgent glance, Ruy Blas would twenty times have scaled the spike-topped fence of the queen's garden, to lay upon the bench a flower that recalled to her the fields of Neuberg. It is no less certain that when his idol had confessed she cared for him, he wanted far more, and claimed it. Do you not suppose that she expected it, and would have been surprised had he been less exacting and less clamorous? I know not. Do you—you resolve this problem in the deep lore of love? I am sure that it must have been many times debated in the *Parlements d'Amour* at Aix and at Toulouse. Ah, dearest, you seem to reproduce those ardent and voluptuous days. I write in prose, but the thought of your surpassing loveliness of which I dream, of all the beauty which exists from your love-lit eyes to your rosy heel, ought to lend to prose the music and the flame of song.

Ah, sweet one, do I "suit" you? It is

ecstasy to hear you say it. I love, I worship thee, with every upward soaring of my soul !

Letter Ninety-first.

SUNDAY MORNING.

Even you cannot imagine what a joy it is to me to know that you like the subject for a picture on which you are now engaged. If that alone should fail, it would be due to the refractory material, and I should only adore you more for thinking better of it than it deserves. What you are really doing is to tell over again the story of Endymion in modern guise. Aye, I was well inspired when I divined you to be Artemis. Her history is indeed thine. In that loveliest of Greek myths, however, there is one thing that is hard to understand : That the goddess, when she stooped to look kindly on a mortal, would be irresistible is plain enough ; but what drew her to Endymion ? He was only a shepherd on Mount Latmos. Was it because, with her celestial intuition, she saw that he alone of mortals had divined her ? It would seem that even a goddess

may well wish to be understood. To the dwellers on the cold heights of Olympus the bliss of sympathy had been denied. That is why so many of them were tempted to prefer the warmer earth to heaven. . .

How little confidence have observing men in the perfect refinement of women, even when they have had consummate advantages of birth and breeding; and how much less when their position may be largely due to accident! This even from the physical viewpoint; and how much less likely is a lover to discover in his beloved a flawless refinement of the intellect, the heart, the soul. Nay, there is but one such living, and he that pens this word is her adorer. Alas! a hopeless adorer, neglecting his sheep upon the slopes of Latmos, and straining his eyes skyward for the advent of Luna and her silver bow. Will he never then be allowed to hope? Perhaps, some evening, when the earth is bathed in silver radiance, and the air is cool with the first breath of autumn, and he, poor watcher, has dropped asleep, worn out with invoking the vision that comes never, he may feel a soft, warm touch

upon his hand, and awake to find himself in paradise. Surely such a hope need not be all a dream. When I think of all that has happened since, a year ago, a lovely lady traced upon a card some words that you remember ; when I think of this, my faith in the future is quite boundless.

Do not chill it. Let me keep it to live upon while you are gone.

YOUR SLAVE.

Letter Ninety-second.

I live in dread of some portentous incident, some sinister reaction in your mind, that shall have the most direct and dreadful bearing on my own fate. Oh, shall you do this thing, shall you cast me off ? Can you not bear with me one hour ? Shall you deny me a moment's happy dreaming between a sleep and a sleep ? It may be that this presentiment is groundless, but it haunts me. Did you ever see a man weep ? It is a repulsive sight. I am glad you did not see me, last night, as I remembered what you had just told me, that you were not so far from me but that I might have seen you

that detestable summer. O God! can a man be so blind as that? The thought of it makes one curse his Maker. But then . . . I have seen you at last.

We needs must love the highest when we see it. Thou art the highest and most human too.

Letter Ninety-third.

I wonder how much you care for me. All day and all night I ask myself that question, for my dreams even are preoccupied. I always fall back on the conclusion that your feeling, whatever it be, is not a hundreth part so deep and intense as mine. It cannot be; it is impossible! There are reasons why it cannot. But I would rather have it, pale as it sometimes seems to me, than all the ardor of the loveliest woman I ever saw before or heard of. So I am happy after a fashion, happier, far happier than I ever was before.

But what do you mean about that man T.? Of course I know him very well, and he has cause to be glad I do. But if you believe that I could allow any man living to

speaking your name to me, I could not see you again ; for such distrust I could not bear. You must expect to hear things. Everyone does. The only question of importance is what you believe.

Now I have written six letters to two from you, but one of yours is worth a dozen of mine. I used not to count in that way. I used to think that a word from me was worth a hundred from another—I mean men—I never wrote to a person of your sex. But now it is quite different. I am thankful for what I can get. And what a letter I did get this morning ! Oh, my beloved, I can never burn it ! Ah, let me keep this one ; it will tear me to burn it !

Only this morning, as I was reading at an open window, a poor creature, trying to earn bread honestly, came and shouted something about “knives to mend.” I was chasing a reluctant thought, and in my irritation bade him crossly to go away. And then in an instant the thought came to me, “Oh, if she had heard me, her lovely, tender lips might quiver !” and the tears came to my eyes, and I went to the window, and

called the man back, and gave him something. It is always thus now. You see you are making me quite too good for this earth! Everybody can get anything from me they wish now, and I shall soon be a pauper.

About Cleopatra; I should want the strongest evidence to convince me that the coin you saw bore the face of the Cleopatra—our Cleopatra—she that in her girlhood detained the great Julius a year in Alexandria, at the very crisis of his fate, and afterward made the world seem well lost to Antony. G.'s scholarship was picked up piecemeal, late in life, and had large gaps in it. As a matter of fact, Cleopatra was a common name in the Ptolemaic family. Half a dozen princesses of that name had coins struck in their honor. That mummy, by the way, which was found, and from which such injurious deductions were drawn, was not her mummy, but another Cleopatra's. We know from contemporary evidence a lot about the famous beauty. She did not have a big nose or thick lips, but was of the purest Greek type.

Do I like long-nosed women? Of course not. Such a feature may go well enough with beauty of a forbidding type, but what artist or what lover would ascribe it to the goddess of desire?

As to the Jewish type, it suited Jael or Judith, but the fate of Holofernes would never have befallen me, for I would never have gone to sleep in the tent of that handsome but sinister daughter of Israel.

Do you want to know what kind of nose I like best and dream of? Run straight to your mirror; there it is!

Letter Ninety-fourth.

MY SWEET DARLING:

I like parts of your second letter, but I loved the whole of the first, which was a beautiful and noble and delicious letter. It struck me in a hundred places at once. Ah, it is wonderful how every part of my nature answers to your touch, and that one who can rouse such passionate madness can, also, in a thousand ways, invigorate and elevate. Oh, this is love indeed, this astonishing emotion that masters the whole being

and makes you in one and the same instant want the beloved one and worship her! Incredible combination of desire and of reverence! One tear of yours kills me with sadness. One touch of your hand thrills me with an ecstasy that makes me yearn to live forever. Yet I sometimes think that with such power as you possess over me, you should be more merciful. Why do you taunt me with what you have taught me to repent of? Why are you harsher than God? By Heaven, I am sorry from my soul that I ever looked at a human being before I saw you. I don't mean to call myself a saint, though you know how St. Augustine and St. Ignatius Loyola lived in their youth. Yet I do mean that since I have loved you I am just that. If to you alone I seem not always saintlike, it is because a Platonic attachment between a man and a woman seems to me impossible. But do you imagine I fancied my princess to be like the women whom the decayed Parisian cads imagine to be ladies? Do you imagine me to be like the men whom the same writers depict as gentlemen? They are very

clever, these writers. No one appreciates their cleverness more than I ; but it takes more than cleverness to be or to understand a gentleman. Ah, well, darling, never torture me again ! Compared with St. Augustine's my life has been as white as snow ; and since I have known you there is no better man alive than I. No, I could not understand Browning's remembering that early love so long. He could not have loved Miss Barrett so much as he thought, and remembered that. To me the whole past is a blank ; I seem only to have lived since I loved you, my love, my precious one, my treasure !

I am going down to the sea ; I want to sit where I can see the ocean and hear some music, and think of my beloved. It would kill me to lose you now ! Good-by.

Letter Ninety-fifth.

I came down here last night, at nine o'clock, so that I might meet no one. I have had my breakfast and dinner sent up to my room, and here I have sat, sometimes hearing some music, and always looking out

upon the water, thinking, thinking of whom do you suppose? After I leave you I must steep myself in nature. I think I told you that after leaving you the other day, I had myself taken up the river. Well, in passing through the park, a man whom I knew stopped me and asked me where I was going. I was sunk in a deep reverie, I had no wits about me, and I stammered that I was going to dine at the riverside. He at once proposed to go with me, and so out of my mind was I—whose fault was it, dear?—that I could make no objection. How I hated that man, loathed the drive and dinner that followed! At long intervals he would say, “You haven’t spoken a word in ten minutes, I am afraid I bore you.” Then, after another pause, “Really I begin to think that my room would be better than my company!” And I wanted to be alone, as I am here, to-night; for I would rather crush my lips against your lovely foot-prints in the sand, than be myself the idol of any other woman on the earth.

Letter Ninety-sixth.

I got your telegram ; it went straight to my heart. Ah, I begin to think that you believe I love you as you ought to be loved !

Yes, I was sad when I first saw you ; my heart was very heavy. I doubted—I doubted—you see, my darling—now I am going to tell you—you are so much younger than I—how I curse fate that I did not see you earlier ! I will never speak of this again ; I could not. I think that you do care for me a little ; how much, how much I know not. But I know that your presence is like the sunshine, and that hope and joy bloom in it. Only with you do I feel—I don't mean with you, but away from you—that dreadful sinking of the heart. I know not how it is, but I seem able to make other women as young as you, beloved, forget that I am older than they. But with you I have dark misgivings.

There, I have unbosomed my heart. Don't ever speak of this ; I could not bear it. For, alas ! a man cannot add a cubit to

his stature, nor subtract a decade from his age. You are in the most splendid bloom of youth. I almost wish that you were not. And yet it would be wicked to wish to mar such a perfect masterpiece of nature and of training. I almost wish I had not said this. Don't ever remind me of it. Never would I forgive you. I am too proud, I think, for my own good. I cannot write any more now; I feel depressed. I sometimes wish that I were dead. But while I live my whole heart is yours, if you care for it. Adieu!

Letter Ninety-seventh.

I said that I looked back on Q. as on the loveliest corner of the earth. There are other places *de par le monde* where everything bears the *cachet* of exquisite taste; but what other place is pervaded with the subtle fascinations of such a peerless, resistless personality? It is because all is radiant and redolent of its sweet mistress, that every man sensitively organized must inhale its atmosphere with the keenest delight.

Ah, when shall I forget our walk upon the shore, and the prints of your slender feet upon the white sand? I stooped and kissed them; and the stroll through the sighing woods, and the drives through the lonely lanes—what memories! Do you know, I have always had my share of pride—without any solid reason—but of late I have had a tremendous accession of that feeling since I have heard that a brilliant and lovely lady considered me a clever man, and had even let it be understood that she thought me rather nice than otherwise. Ah, that, if I were an emperor, would make me feel myself more imperial.

What a charming nook that was in your drawing room, where we sat, one evening, among the cool shadows! Ah, would that I might be privileged to make my vows there, though their temperature would ill befit the place!

What a little world this is, as we were saying! I found in my letter-box a letter from W. It seems that there is there a nest of your enemies; the only enemies that so sweet a woman could have—those

engendered by sheer envy. Mrs. — manages to secrete more than her fair share of venom. She has tried to do you harm.

Ah, when shall I see thee, lovely one, again? the sweetest, most generous, most forgiving, elevating, and inspiring creature that is drawing vital air.

Ah, I pine for the sight of her handwriting, since I cannot see the face that is so dear to me.

Au revoir, ma bien aimée !

Letter Ninety-eighth.

You say that you believe women to be more charming now than they ever were. That may be, but the stage setting is not so rare. A really great lady like yourself, for instance, would have had a much nicer time in Rome, about the year 50 of our era. What luxury, what magnificence, what exquisite refinement, what artistic embellishment and intensifying of life ! Ah, yes ; you should have lived when with your walk, or with your faint, mysterious smile, you would have made those superb Roman women desire to poison you, and thus remove you

from their path. By the way, you know that lovely bust that the ignorant call a bust of Clytie, and imagine to be an ideal head and bosom? Well, there is scarcely any doubt that it is a portrait bust—the portrait of Poppæa Sabina, as she looked when Nero took her away from Otho. There is about her lips and chin the same extraordinary and haunting combination of unslaked curiosity and passion which is so strongly suggested upon your lips. I wonder if you can detest traveling by rail as much as I do. To me it seems the quintessence of our nineteenth century vulgarity, our sham civilization. Oh, what a funny thing our vaunted progress must seem to an on-looker from an elder planet, Mars, for instance! We have harnessed the lightning mainly for the purpose of enabling a stock gambler to signal his confederate; and we have coerced the genii of steam to permit a commercial traveler, with his little box of samples, to go from New York to San Francisco in five days. It took five weeks for a trireme to carry a play of Euripides, or a dialogue of Plato, from

Athens to Syracuse ; but when it got there it stayed. Oh, yes, it stayed, and has outlasted the Roman roads that seemed imperishable ; and it will outlive our railways of which we are so proud.

Ah, go on ! Have courage, do better, better, nobler and nobler work ; work that men and women will never allow to die. You can do it, you will do it, you shall do it—a trophy worthy of the lovely hand that reared it !

Letter Ninety-ninth.

Heavens, how I love you ! Do you realize what it means to absorb a man's heart as you have mine ? And now you have written me a second letter, when you could not have yet received my first. How am I to repay this ? I will consecrate to you whole years of worship—years unexpected that I will wrest from death.

Of course common people sneer at Z., and particularly at an act which their spiritual atrophy and cowardice could not imitate. But you and I can pity and understand him.

I have sent you to-day the biography

which you asked for. It is indispensable, if we agree with Sainte-Beuve, that we must be acquainted with an author's life if we wish to understand his books. The purport of Ibsen's biography may be summed up in a sentence: so far as the "dramas of the day" are concerned, Ibsen has presented on the stage, and under the conditions of dramatic art, very much the same view of foreign society, and the principles which actuate it, which Tolstoi didactically sets forth in "My Religion." *Voilà tout.*

Ah, dearest, the miniature! the miniature! thank God that you remembered it; it will make all the difference in the world to me. How could a photograph render you who should be painted? Don't you see that I love you, love you as only men love once in a hundred years, and that I must have something which has life and color to gaze upon in the long vigils of the night. Ah, yes; and you say, my beloved, you are going to bless me with the gift.

Letter One Hundredth.


Thank God that you did not send me

that first long letter of which you speak. I know that it would have killed me. Ah, yes; that is no conventional phrase; it would be easy for you to kill me. All you would have to do would be to be silent; that would take away the wish to live, and when that is gone some live not long. But you will not do what would be so easy; will you, dear? You will spare me yet a little while. Say you will, say that you will write, so that I may find a word from you when I return from this long unhappy journey. What is there that you wish which I would not do? Why, I would not even ask to see you if you should say that you did not wish it; but for God's sake, for my sake, if you even care for me a little, don't say that, anything but that! You will not, will you? Say you will not, queen of my soul. Oh, let me thank you again for not sending me the first long letter. I can guess what it contained, because my soul is not utterly unworthy of your own. I can guess, but you could never guess, what the effect of such a letter would have been on me. I could not have borne it. I should

have loved you to distraction all the same, but I should have hated and loathed myself, and under such conditions I could not exist. But you were merciful—yes, you are merciful. From the first I knew you to be the sweetest woman in the world. You are not a tigress, you are an angel; the only angel that ever gave wings to me. I am always on my knees to you. You know it, and the angel held you from dealing me a deadly blow. Don't ever want to kill me again. If you do, I shall know it in some strange, subtle way, and you will not need to speak.

Letter One Hundred and First.

I have this moment returned, having again traveled all night, in order to be at least near you a few hours earlier. You need not change the address of those darling letters until next Monday. Oh, dearest, I am almost dead with yearning. There has not been a second of my waking hours in which I have not thought of you, and of sleep I have had indeed but little. The visions that rise before me when the lights have been put out are not by any



means conducive to slumber. Strange to say, most of these scenes seem to be enacted upon an island—some enchanted island of the Ægean, like that to which the prudent Thetis bore Achilles dressed in girl's clothes—a visitant whose performances are said to have been regarded as scandalous and shocking by the feminine on-lookers of a certain age; though it is not recorded that the handsome married women joined in the outcry.

Alas, my head is full of islands and their intoxicating incidents!

You, on the other hand, my princess, never deign to give me a single thought.

Well, yes, perhaps one thought on Friday; for the letter which you received that morning would have warmed a stone. But why should you trouble yourself to think much more of one you have so utterly subdued? What is the use of revanquishing the vanquished? You have stamped with your little foot on my neck, the physical, tangible, decisive proof of mastery that not one woman in five hundred million gets. Yes, and you get it for nothing. Well no, not


quite that, but only for the small change of love.

If you don't tell me, immediately after receiving this, that I may see you this afternoon or evening, I will do something desperate. I will go back from whence I came; I could not do anything more desperate than that.

If you had for me a hundredth part of the mad desire and longing that I have for you, you would have flown to me, and we would have met somewhere in mid-air. I simply shall not begin to breathe till I see your handwriting, and know that I am to look upon your face to-day.

Letter One Hundred and Second.

I revere, I worship you. I have never loved you as I do to-night. If anyone had told me this morning that within twelve hours I should adore you ten times more than I did then, I should have laughed at him, for it would have seemed impossible. Yet it is true. The oftener I see you the more ineffable becomes the tenderness with which I think of you, and the more fierce and



quenchless is my thirst for you. Nor is it for one second to earth that my passion for you draws me ; it is upward. In my dreams it is to the heights you beckon me, and it is there that you fall into my arms. Do you know, beloved, that at certain moments to-day, your face was illuminated like that of no mortal. You cannot be an earthly woman. Heavens, what a sight entrancing your sweet face, when love shines through it ! The very greatest of the singers, Dante, has imagined it, but never saw it, never saw what I have seen at last. Ah, you are the ideal sweetheart. You satisfy every thought, taste, impulse, inspiration. You act upon your lover like some strange chemic heat that brings out all his capacities. Oh, you are indeed a splendid creature, as well as the most delicious little piece of femininity. How sweetly womanly you are ! You cannot guess how soft your eyes are sometimes ; they melt, yes they would melt a stone, and God knows I am no stone to you ! And your shyness is so fascinating !

Letter One Hundred and Third.

On my way I seized your delicious letter, and have been devouring it ever since. Ah, if you loved me I could defy fortune, destiny, God himself to harm me. Does that seem blasphemous? Oh, no; it is the recognition of his best gift to man.

I have had some annoyances. There is a state of increasing moral tension about me; my enemies have been at work, but the sight of your dear handwriting whirled all out of consciousness forever. If your hand can do that, what cannot your face do?

I foresaw that you would not let me see you Friday in your boudoir. Ah, yes, I am beginning to understand you a little, only a little. I never could fathom you utterly, but I am beginning to learn some of your pretty ways—ah, they *are* pretty!

I am fidelity itself and passion inexhaustible, although at first so prejudiced you were it is hard for you to believe it. But you will see. Give me a chance to show it. My God, how could a man that you have been kind to look at any other woman?

I have thought much of our last conversation. With what touching sincerity and infectious poignancy you speak of grief! Ah, dearest, in your words it is not talent, it is genius that I find! How otherwise could you so affect me?

How I detest those people, the type of whom you speak! I was brought up among them. Luckily I reacted violently. It was as if hens had hatched a hawk.

I agreed with what you said about American reserve. There is no such thing as deep emotion which does not find an outlet. One might as well talk of lava being hot and plentiful when it doesn't erupt. Yet it is strange enough that I have always been very reserved before. It is only to you that I speak out of my heart.


Letter One Hundred and Fourth.

When, in your angry moments, you declare that I don't suit you in anything, I refuse to believe you. What a state of things! What are you going to do with a man who, however you revile him, persists in thinking you the sweetest woman in the world, dear

Hélo? You will have to try some act of violence, such as whipping me with your slipper, or strangling me with your silk stocking, or trampling on me with your slender foot; which shall it be? I should revel in any of those penalties!

I was delighted to-day to see and know how thoroughly your pictures have been appreciated abroad; above all that they have been spoken of in such high praise by one who is an acknowledged master. Such unprecedented testimony to the merit of your work ought to let in a ray of light upon the darkened intellects that cannot recognize superior talent.

They are touching lines you gave me, "Thou or I." They were evidently written by a woman, and she is quite right in finally acknowledging that the man died first. It is a very curious fact—have you not noticed it?—that while of little passions the woman is generally the first if not the only victim, in great passions it is the man that suffers. We know that Beatrice did not value Dante's devotion at the price of a glove, and that Laura never gave a thought to Petrarch.



It is true, on the other hand, that Vanessa died for Swift—one of the most amazing triumphs of intellect over physical unattractiveness that ever I heard of. What is really beautiful in the lines you saved for me is the fact that the survivor who writes them, and the reader also, is long uncertain which of the two lovers is the dead one.

You say in your sweetness that I am not one of the vanquished in life's battle. Everything is relative. Defeat or triumph depends upon the aims one started with. But oh, I have known you! I have not been vanquished, then; that was an all-sufficing victory.

Letter One Hundred and Fifth.

I have had to spend many days and hours lately among the frightful cads who haunt this place, because I was nearer you and could more readily obtain your letters. Such considerations have no weight with me. I would bear much worse humiliation for the sake of a line from you. Yes, I could bear anything if I was not right in divining that you have had another violent

reaction against me. Well, whose fault is it? Certainly not yours. A wise man does not blame a woman for such impulsive movements. He puts the blame where it belongs—upon himself. It is his part to put an end to such instinctive variations and recoils. It is easier to see how to do it when I remember how different you were before you got back from M.—before you saw me and heard me talk. One must be blind not to perceive the remedy. I desire to be put on probation for six weeks. During that time I do not wish you to consent to see me. If in that time I cannot convince you that I love you as you wish to be loved, I will submit without a murmur to a final decree of banishment; but I want a reprieve and further trial. I believe that I can make you forget the things that make you hate me. You never owned that you hated me before you came back from M. Why is it now impossible to regain the trust and the affection that for a little while I dreamed were mine? There are still some arrows in my quiver. Who knows? perhaps I might make you like me better

than you did in that first April week. At all events let me try. I have swallowed all the insults that I can digest at present, suffered all the misery that for the moment I can bear, and I can speak of all this more reasonably and cogently than I can write. You will let me speak to-morrow; but we will not walk unless you command it. For such an interview as I wish, and which means everything to me, you surely could let me come to your house. But whatever your orders, of course I shall obey them, and nothing that you could say or do could prevent me from being,

Yours forever,

HUBERT.

Letter One Hundred and Sixth.

I read the extract from the letter which you sent me with the strangest sensations of mingled amusement and delight. But you cannot terrify me by showing me how redoubtable you are to others. Of course you are, but the old soothsayer in France was right; you are too intensely *femme* not to be the slave of the man, the lucky one

whom you should really care for. Ah, surely, he would be born under a bright star, and you would not be in the least afraid of his mastery; one never is when one really loves. That is the final culminating test. Of course you would rebel, because it naturally takes time for an empress to realize that she has given herself a master at last; yet really, upon the whole, she does not suffer much. There are worse things in this vale of tears than to be the slave of one who loves you to distraction; and who cannot define the difference between slavery and tyranny. . . .

I told you the deepest wish of my heart when I said that I wanted to carry you to Constantinople. How have I smiled when you have told me that I knew not jealousy! If I do not dwell upon your past it is because I am quite sufficiently preoccupied by the present and the future. Dearest, never make me jealous! You do not know me if you imagine that it will be safely done; I don't mean safely to you but safely to me. I am not vain; it is only vanity that enables men to bear the pangs of real jealousy.

You will toss these warnings aside, I dare say, but if you do, and truly care for me a little, as I must now believe, you may find out some day too late that I was very earnest. Oh, you will never understand how I am racked by that feeling; but now it is enough joy to me to hear you speak and touch your ardent hand. Forgive me if I have sometimes blasphemed by pretending otherwise in the wild and fruitless effort to gain more!

Au revoir, à bientôt, my morning star!

Letter One Hundred and Seventh.

I kissed your letter for the exquisite hand that penned it. You bid me tell you more about my life; it is too humdrum, too packed with drudgery to interest such an one as you. There is not an act, a word, a thought which I would not gladly have you know.

Often have I wished that I could give you the ring which made the bearer invisible. When I read your letter I felt wicked, almost sacrilegious that I dared to feel anything but reverence for thee. Ah, forgive

me that I love you with such a passionate human ardor ; I cannot help it. It is too late, I fear, for me to change the nature of my passion. Although you have everything in you with which to elevate a lover, you have also, dearest, everything with which to bewitch him. For if you are the noblest, the fairest, the most radiantly gifted of women, you are also the most physically lovely.

Ah, in pity, dearest, love me !

Letter One Hundred and Eighth.

Ah, yes, dear ; in spite of your tender and inspiring words, my life was *manquée*. I did not care for pecuniary success. It seemed to me that I had sold my birthright for a mess of pottage. I felt, as I told you that first time, like a gladiator, like a man born free, but made captive, and forced to use his sinews and his thews for hire. I hated life ; I wanted to die. I saw no possibility of change to another profession ; and all I looked forward to was accumulating as quickly as possible a provision for those who are dependent upon me, and

then quieting my heart-burnings in the most effectual way.

And then I saw your painting, and in it I saw you, and for the first time realized all that love might mean. That oath, ah, it was an oath, dearest, which it would have been the most shocking blasphemy to take about any other woman but you. I had used it once about myself, when I swore to outgrow selfishness, and to recognize the responsibility which I too lightly had assumed. It was by my mother's memory that I swore to touch your heart; and it is not alone your beauty which I yearn for, it is the sweet and noble and lofty soul, the genius that radiates through your looks and your words. I wanted to marry your mind. I cannot tell you with what indescribable emotions of delight I have seen your last picture. Remember, it is the first thing of yours that has been exhibited since you began to care for me a little. I cannot describe to you the elation with which I fancied that I could descry some traces of an approaching marriage of our souls,

Good-night, my angel.

I must have your heart, it must be **mine**, queen of my soul !

When shall I look again into those love-haunted eyes ?

Letter One Hundred and Ninth.

I cannot forget the color of your cheeks the last time that I saw you. Why, they were beautiful disks of flame, such disks as Venus wore when she sprang out of the sea at Paphos, to set the world ablaze.

How many things you have taught me ! above all a hundred passionate and tender yearnings of which I had never dreamed. You ought to love me if love ever is responsive to ardor in the worshiper.

Do you know that when I think of and sometimes speak to you, I cannot help using diminutives, dignified and stately as you are at will. I use them, I think, in obedience to a deep instinct twined around the roots of a virile heart, yes, an instinct hundreds of thousands of years old. For even in the cave dwellings you find the bones of the men close to the portal, while the re-

mains of the women and children lie far within. It is clear that all the tenants of such caves succumbed to some overwhelming assault; but the men, at least, fell in the right place. No, it is impossible for the man really in love not to feel a protecting impulse.

Vraiment, vous savez il est défendu d'être enchanteresse à un tel point.

How do you manage to live and be so sweet? I marvel that other women have not long since poisoned you.

Do you remember that tryst upon the beautiful bridge? Ah, there is not a moment of the day, or of my waking hours at night, when I do not remember that!

Letter One Hundred and Tenth.

I send back the book that you lent me. Of course I liked it, loved it. How can I help liking anything that you like? Never was there such perfect sympathy. I understand you; I know what you think and wish. Oh, dearest, what bliss you give me when you tell me that I have made you happy. I want to, and I rack my own

heart when I am unkind to you. . . . I live and feel only in you. I haven't a trace of egotism left, unless it be the vanity suddenly awakened in me by the belief that you care for me a little. Will you forgive that sort of egotism? How good it was of you to write that letter; you knew I should be pining. Yes, I pine.

I am intensely jealous of everyone that saw those little gold-embroidered shoes; and I dislike and distrust the keen-sighted person that saw a mystery in my darling's face. Give *me* the mysteries; they are *mine*. If there is "radiance" it belongs to me. Ah, I shall have to lock you up. You are too bewilderingly handsome to be allowed to go about. The Turks are right. I am rapidly becoming a Turk. If I could carry you off to a villa on the Bosphorus, I would straightway become a Moslem. I should be your master, and you could not escape. Would you want to?

Last night again I had a dream of thee! Ah, in my dreams I am like one under delicious spells. The happy victim of some tender witchery, the enamored

slave of an impassioned mistress, whose harshest injunction is to love . . . and love.

And then, alas ! I wake.

Letter One Hundred and Eleventh.

Do we not have our fill of romance, sweet Hélo ? or did I dream that someone cried "Fire" when we were together in your studio. I would have wrapped my coat over your face and bosom, and you would have taken my hand, and thus I would have conveyed you through the flame. I doubt if all the engines in the city could put out the flames that your loveliness kindles ! Dearest, tell me, is your throat better ? It is the strangest thing—I also have a sore throat this morning. I never was so delighted in my life ; I want to have everything that you have. Before God, if I knew that you were dying of diphtheria, I would upset the earth to get to you, that I might drink your breath and rejoin you quickly. There is no doubt about it that since I knew you I am becoming a convert to Islam. And if I believed in the harem,

I should not care for any odalisques. One sultana would suffice, provided her name was yours. But I would have her guarded with drawn swords; and never should she put her face out of the *zenana*, except in her lord's company. I am afraid you think a palace on the Bosphorus would be a dismal prospect for a belle!

Letter One Hundred and Twelfth.

My adored one, I have your telegram. Then you did not like one of my letters? Ah me, and I was so foolishly happy. No sooner had I written and dispatched that poor little missive than I desired to live over again the hours that I passed with you. First I drove up the river and got some dinner, or pretended to, sitting at the same table, and in the very chair where she had sat. Then I came home, threw myself on the sofa, in my study, determined to sleep or dream there. It is a strange fancy, but it is a fact that I fell into a deep, refreshing slumber, an amazing contrast to the broken and feverish hours of the preceding night. But alas, perhaps she doesn't want me to

sleep; perhaps she doesn't want me to feel happy.

Letter One Hundred and Thirteenth.

What an extraordinary thing is love! I perceive that I never knew anything about it until you flashed upon me, and I fell forthwith to worshiping. I really used to be fool enough to suppose that love was all fun. Heavens! there is very little fun in it. There is some rapture and a great deal of torment. And the strangest thing of all is that even the torments your beloved causes you seem ecstasies compared with any pleasures another could give.

Ah, do you know that you put a wonderful vitality and delicious meaning into even the commonplace phrases which I used to loathe. It is a copybook aphorism that love is a madness. How often have I smiled at that! Why—it is true. I am quite mad. I know that I have not been sane an hour since you came back; and even before that I had shown many signs of aberration. On the night of your departure, for example, it would have needed but

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little more to upset my reason. And yet the sweet and splendid creature that has so conquered, demented, absorbed me that I only breathe at her good pleasure, has sometimes bidden me to "pause and think." Why, would she have my heart stop beating? While it beats at all it will beat for her. And thinking?—What then does she call this incessant preoccupation of my brain? When I cease, dearest, to think of you, be sure that I am dead.

Then there is another conventional phrase which I used to hear with amused incredulity. "He actually adores the ground she walks upon." Well—this too is true. Did I not stoop and kiss your footprints on the sand?

Letter One Hundred and Fourteenth.

To-night I had been inveigled into joining a party to the play. But when the evening came, having received no letter from you, I was actually *ill*. It is incredible what power the mind has on the body. So I got out of my engagement as best I could, and oh, how thankful I was that I had not gone!

For your dear, dear letter came at last. I have kissed every page. Ah, you make me good as well as happy; you make me believe in God. How else can I account for the existence of such a beautiful and noble being? Thank you for telling me that you don't flirt. I will try to believe you, since you cannot guess what that belief will mean to me. As for me, I don't know that any other woman is existing. If I had to see and be civil to other women, they would be repulsive, loathsome to me. I pity other men who imagine that there are any real women in the world except one. Of course I am your slave; you have put a ribbon around my neck. You didn't need a chain; of course I would obey your slightest wish.

Do you know, I have heard your eyes called cruel, but to me they seem full of tenderness. Sometimes I feel that I could be satisfied with lying forever at your slender feet, and riveting my eyes upon the witchery of your face; and again, I feel that nothing will content me but to seize and crush you and make you my own. So I really cannot tell whether my passion for

you has more of gentleness or of fierceness in it.

Last Letter—One Hundred and Fifteenth.

When I found nothing to-day, I rushed over to a quiet nook, and read over for the hundredth time the few of my darling's letters—there are five of them—which I still retain; especially the precious one which you penned just before your departure. I never burn one of your letters without feeling as if I had committed a murder, as if I had killed something whose beauty and nobility should have been guaranties of immortality. What delicious things you say to me! What a wonderful thing is passion when it is refined, inflamed, and glorified by the soul of a genius and the delicacy of a great lady. . . .

In one of your letters you say that there is a side of your character that I have never seen—an irritable side. I never shall see it, dearest; it is not natural to you. In an atmosphere of instant comprehension, perfect sympathy, and devoted love what could chafe or exasperate? I know well what

are the conditions that clog and cramp and stifle a sensitive and aspiring nature. It would be ridiculous to compare myself to thee from such a point of view, but even I, who used to be the most even-tempered of men, have of late rebelled against non-comprehension, and become impatient. But I have shown no traces of such a change to you, sweet one, have I? How could I when you make me so happy and so proud? For your words and your bewitching presence fill me with a happiness that I have never dreamed before.

My precious dear, I wonder whether any man has loved a woman precisely as I love you. My love is the strangest combination of passion, sympathy, admiration, and respect. I cannot separate the elements even in imagination, they are so intimately blended, chemically fused. What potion hast thou given me, oh, thou daughter of the gods? Why is it that I know not whether to kneel to you in worship, or to seize you in my arms and learn whether my divinity is also a loving woman? You have brought sunshine into my life. Nature has stamped

upon you all her enthralling graces. Never shall I forget my feelings, the other afternoon, when, after stopping your carriage, I turned sharply, and saw *her*—my goddess—advancing toward me, tripping as Aurora tripped—no, floating, skimming like a splendid sailing-ship under full canvas, on an enamored gale. My heavens, what a sight was that! I think that in my death hour that sight will come to my fast closing eyes, and they that watch beside my pillow will see a smile upon my lips; for I shall see you, darling, coming to meet me—to meet me—somewhere—on the further side of Styx.

THE END.



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